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"With little here to do or see
Of things that in the great world be,
Sweet Daisy! oft I talk to thee,
For thou art worthy,
Thou unassuming common-place
Of Nature, with that homely face,
And yet with something of a grace,
Which love makes for thee!

Oft on the dappled turf at ease
I sit and play with similes,
Loose types of things through all degrees,
Thoughts of thy raising;
And many a fond and idle name
I give to thee for praise or blame,
As is the humour of the game,
While I am gazing."

To the Daisy—WORDSWORTH.

MISS DAISY DIMITY.

CHAPTER I.

Of all the floures in the mede,
Then love I most these floures white and rede,
Such that men callen daisies in our toun.

SQUIRE DIMITY was standing on the lawn that separated his square white family mansion from the high-road, watching his whole gang of labourers—five men and a boy—raking hay.

The sun was shining gloriously; the birds were singing as if each little brown body held a far bigger soul of music. One cuckoo had got perfectly hoarse from his exertions in one of the high elm-trees that had given its name, two generations ago, to Elm Hall; when the squire's grandfather built the house, and the surrounding gentry sniffed thereat, and called it Calico Hall, and himself a "parvenoo."

The old man did not care, bless them! He used to slap his pocket, and say it was a jolly good thing to *be* a parvenoo! Better than to have got to the top of the tree, and then be going down the hill. His metaphors, you see, had been apt to get somewhat jumbled together.

Now the present good squire stood, ankle-deep in hay, under a big elm; with his chest expanded, his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, and his broad red face reddening more and ever more while blinking at the sun. And thus he meant to stand a good half hour longer in animal enjoyment, when—

"Papa, papa," cried his eldest daughter Daisy, coming

tripping towards him over the grass, "Mrs. Dimity says—will you come in immediately, please."

Daisy was as fresh and sweet as her godmother flowers. She was a little creature, rather like a dove, with large blue eyes that generally looked immensely astonished. She was plump as to figure, but with a small trim waist that it was quite a pleasure to span, especially as it did not feel tightened. In spite of this latter advantage, Daisy's young brothers called her "Chubby." (Thus are charms vulgarly described in the home circle.) Her father spoke of her as his "Sweet Dumpling." If that was any better expression is a matter of opinion.

Just now Daisy Dimity's eyes looked even bigger and more dewy bright than usual; her cheeks, that were generally twin roses, were more like field-poppies from excitement; and the squire noticed, with slow surprise, that she was hardly able to speak, she was so breathless.

"There is a letter just come from Jack; a very important one! Would you please mind at once—I mean, would you mind, please, coming in—at once?"

"A letter from Jack!" echoed the squire; but in a manner far from being as precipitate as her own.

Jack was the soldier son—the eldest—lately returned with his regiment, after having had his first trial of army life, for a few years, on foreign service.

The Dimitys had never been martial before, so far as anybody knew. In the squire's grandfather's time they had emerged from the peaceable occupations of honest huckstering into the still gentler life of small country gentlefolk. The squire had felt horror at first of his son's choice of a profession, for of course all soldiers were wild, were scapegraces, etc.; and Mr. Dimity's own mother, whom he took after, had always declared that "officers were the mischief!" so the worthy gentleman quoted.

But Jack, who likewise took after *his* mother (a lady who during her short life had shown much more determination than her husband), would have his own way. So now, with a groan, Mr. Dimity asked of his soul, "Can it be Debts?"

Daisy, with that quickness of sympathy for which her sex is so justly famed, perceived that her father was alarmed, because he cried "Phew——!" with prolonged dolefulness, pursed up his genial lips into what he mistakenly imagined

to be the similitude of a closed oyster-shell, and wagged his head in a portentous manner.

"It isn't anything wrong," she cried out, with her heart going pit-a-pat against her ribs. "It isn't, really" (then the murder came out). "Only Jack's regiment is giving a ball, and he wants me to go to it!"

"You, child? Why, you never were at a ball before."

"Why, papa, that's just the reason——"

"But, bless my heart, surely you're not old enough."

"Oh! papa—I'm eighteen past, ever so long."

"Bless my heart!" said the squire again, as they were moving towards the house. "I never know what ages you all are. Why, it was only the other day they told me you were sixteen. Well, well, we'll see what your stepmother says about it."

No, the squire never did know the ages of any of his family. He used to drive the present Mrs. Dimity wild, she declared, by thinking his own daughters so much younger, and herself years older than they all really were. She was the gentlest woman imaginable; but a worm will turn when its feelings are hurt—and this was one of the vulnerable points of this especial human worm. So the squire, with a puzzled expression and ponderous steps, sighing secretly in his heart over his hay, obeyed the feminine appeal to his superior wisdom, and went indoors. His was an honest square house, and in it there were no gables or nooks, or unexpected steps to break one's neck stumbling down. The drawing-room was a square apartment on the right side of the entrance door of Elm Hall; the dining-room was one exactly corresponding on the left side. As to the drawing-room itself, it hardly deserves description in these days, for there was no "high art" about it, no dado, no chippendale chairs and brasses, no blue china or peacock trimmings, not a stick of furniture half as old as Queen Anne's days.

It was only suggestive of sunlight, flowers, and chintz coverings over goodness knew what of finery, uncovered three times a year for the dinner parties which the squire respectively termed "hi-tum, ti-tum, and scrub." Indeed, it is doubtful whether vulgar "scrub" was ever thought worthy by Mrs. Dimity of beholding those hidden glories.

The squire stood now before the fireplace, which was filled with growing ferns and ivy this summer weather, and mechanically tucked up his coat-tails. He eyed his wife,

then Daisy, and his next daughter—young Polly, of sixteen—who, ranged together, were all eyeing him; and he felt inclined to say, "At it——!"

But, instead, he only observed to Mrs. Dimity:

"Well, my dear?"

"Here is Jack's letter, my dear. Daisy, dear—my dear Daisy, read it out," said Mrs. Dimity nervously, for she was a gentle thin crane of a woman, tyrannised over by her many boisterous boys, and without much stamina.

Daisy hereupon read out a warm effusion from her brother, begging his "dear old girl" to be sure and get leave, and come down to Marstown for the ball their regiment was giving next week.

It would be so jolly to have her, and Mrs. Cox had offered to put her up for ten days—which was really awfully kind. Indeed, Cox and the whole family were most good-natured to him, and he liked them, for his part, very much.

Mrs. Cox had promised to explain all details, and so, as he hated letter-writing, he remained her affectionate brother,

"F. G. Dimity."

P.S.—He would be very glad to see the mum and governor at the ball, too, only he didn't suppose they'd come.

A grunt from the squire indicated that the last sentence was about the most sensible one of the letter, in his opinion.

"Mrs. Cox! And who, on this earth, *is* Mrs. Cox?" he now bluntly inquired. "Where did he pick her up? Is she respectable? And what put it into her head to ask the child?"

"She is my second cousin, once removed, Squire, as I think you might have remembered from seeing her sister's husband, who had married again very well, and is a banker, at our wedding," remarked Mrs. Dimity with tremulous dignity, now opening out a second letter, and smoothing her dress.

"Of course," the good lady went on, "I don't expect my relations to be thought much of in this house; though she is a very good doctor's wife in Marstown, as I have always heard, not that I ever met her, and he used to be in the army—I mean he is a very good doctor, I am sure.

At least, he *ought* to be, from his wife's connections. Though, of course, if it had been a relation of your own, or of the first Mrs. Dimity's——"

She stopped, quite hurt, and in a mildly tearful warm state—for this was a second point on which Mrs. Dimity "had her feelings."

"I am sure, dear, she must be a very nice person; most kind! Fancy asking me for your sake, you know, because you are her cousin!" cried Daisy, in eager sympathy, giving her stepmother a most consoling glance out of her limpid big eyes, while young Polly eyed her father with silent reproof.

Of course Mrs. Cox must be the warmest-hearted lady alive—a living piece of philanthropy; a creature all made of the milk of human kindness. Had she not asked Daisy to stay for her first ball?

In a mournful voice Mrs. Dimity now began reading out her distant relation's letter. It was, indeed, a very well-expressed and warm invitation. The writer, supposing Mrs. Dimity's surprise on receiving her letter from Marstown, whither Dr. Cox had removed some years ago, declared her own delight on meeting lately Mr. Jack Dimity, her cousin's stepson. Here followed some quite elegant phrases, worthy of the polite letter-writer, *à propos* of consanguinity. Mrs. Cox had never seen Mrs. Dimity, but her feelings were none the less warm, etc. For their relationship's sake she had warmly hailed Mr. Jack's acquaintance, and would as affectionately welcome his sister, whom the young man was so eager to see at the ball to be given by his regiment.

If entrusted to her, Mrs. Cox promised to take even more care of Daisy than of her own daughters. Hereupon followed loving touches as to her own family, and lucid details as to the girl's journey. A sensible letter altogether.

Having ended its perusal, Mrs. Dimity folded up her letter with a sigh, put it carefully in its envelope, and regarded her husband.

"Well, well, well, my dear, you know best about your cousin, I daresay," said the squire, moving uneasily, being in more mortal terror of Mrs. Dimity's "feelings" than of a sound scolding, and longingly looking outside. "Only, if you have all made up your minds already about this ball,

why in the name of goodness did you call me away from the hay to consult me, as you all said?" (He rather scored there.) "Let the little one go, with all my heart, and I hope she'll enjoy herself; and Polly, too, if she likes. The girls are for you to look after, not me."

"Not at all; they are *your* daughters, Squire," replied Mrs. Dimity, stopping a futile attempt on the good man's part to gain the door, and confronting him with the suddenly decided air of a well-principled worm of a stepmother.

It should never be laid to her door that she had sent Daisy to stay with her (Mrs. Dimity's) second cousin, on whose social position the squire had seemed to cast aspersions, as she observed.

Naturally, blood being thicker than water, she thought —she hoped—her second cousin was *respectable* (with meekest satire).

But if the squire's daughter was to go now, after what he had said—(poor Dimity, still hankering after the hay, scratched his head and wondered what he had said)—it must be HIS OWN DOING!

"Perhaps it would be better, Daisy, my dear, if you were to go away and let your papa and me talk this affair over together," added Mrs. Dimity, with the sigh of a misunderstood woman, whose anxieties to do her duty by her husband and his first family and all the world were not quite appreciated. "Of course, as to the idea of Polly going, I never heard of such a thing! And she not out! My dear Polly, and you have more sense than to think of it; but men never think——"

"Not out, isn't she? Well, she's as big as Daisy, anyhow," cried the squire in a would-be jolly voice, ruefully watching his two daughters slip out of the room.

Both had most unusually tightened up their mouths into rosy buttons with a demure air that said as plainly as could be: "For once we are on our stepmamma's side; and if Daisy is not allowed to stay with that most warm-hearted woman and well-connected person, Mrs. Cox, for Jack's ball, we shall cry."

"Perhaps, also, my dears, you would give the children their lessons—as usual—meantime. I hear them making a little noise," added Mrs. Dimity with a meek tone, as if, her family having been impugned, everything in this world now began with "perhaps" for her; and perhaps henceforth

even Squire Dimity's pantry-boy might not have the kindness to black poor Mrs. Dimity's boots.

"My love, what is the use of this consultation? I am perfectly—perfectly—perfectly satisfied with all you decide on about the girls," exclaimed the squire when they were left alone, preparing to bolt.

"Oh no, John! you might reproach me hereafter," and out came a damp handkerchief.

"But, my darling—my darling!" expostulated Mr. Dimity, who always grew extremely affectionate in language during such domestic scenes. Then, as Mrs. Dimity turned to draw her own easy-chair nearer very solemnly, he threw up the window-sash with a cheerful grin, and, the lawn and the hay being just outside, prepared in his own mind "to cut and run," as he mentally expressed it.

"You'll stay, John?" said his wife, with feeble spirit.

And so the poor squire was accordingly obliged to do for the next quarter of an hour by the clock.

CHAPTER II.

There were his young barbarians all at play.

The two sisters had no sooner left the drawing-room than, on their slow, very slow, progress upstairs to the schoolroom, they twined their arms round each other's waists in sign of mutual sympathy. Young Polly looked very hard in her sister's face, to express consolation and hope. Daisy drooped her head and gazed over the balusters, as who should say, "If I am *not* to go—it will be my duty to try and bear it; but one may always weep."

Meanwhile, such a fearful racket was going on overhead in the schoolroom, where these two young daily governesses were being missed by their juvenile brethren, that the sisters dared not linger longer on the stairs over their little embraces and mutual agonies of doubt and fear.

Mrs. Dimity said she had heard "a little noise," like the gentle mother of many she was. Why, the din was ear-splitting!

On opening the door, all the Tribe of Gad, as the

squire called his second family, was discovered at tribal play. Billy, the eldest, was standing in his hob-nailed boots on the top of the cottage piano, flinging cane chairs across the room to Bobby, who received them mounted aloft devastatingly among lesson-books and desks on the schoolroom table.

Billy's aim was edifyingly accurate; but his younger brother's missiles generally fell short, when each crash was signalised by a war-whoop and savage dance of joy.

Jemmy, the third, was "niggering" himself, by adorning his rosy cheeks with black, brought with pains from the highest attainable recesses of the chimney. But this was remediable.

On the other side there was meek Master Charlie, Mrs. Dimity's delicate darling, supposed by his mamma to be incapable of mischief, who was now silently amusing himself by snipping short the eyelashes of his baby brother, whom to that end he had propped up in a corner, and fenced in with a sofa cushion, to prevent the recalcitrant infant from crawling away; and, whenever the baby remonstrated with a howl, Charlie either gently pummelled him, or read him a lecture on the sin of rebellion to his elders. Mrs. Dimity destined Charlie to be a clergyman.

The two sisters, being accustomed to such sights, did not wait long to express horror, but very quickly restored some order.

Daisy gently reasoned, young Polly scolded soundly, according to their respective natures.

Then the desks and lesson-books were put to use again; but the two little governesses had not their hearts in the tasks much more than the pupils, their ears being strained to catch the opening of the drawing-room door, and heads being often quickly raised in sudden expectation.

"Now, Jemmy dear, spell gig," said Daisy, encouragingly, but with a secret sigh.

"Gig!" slowly soliloquised Jemmy; and then, struck with a phonetic inspiration, he uttered confidently, like a young Scotchman, what sounded like, "Gie-i-gie."

"Now, Jemmy, there is no letter in the whole alphabet that sounds like your gie."

"Then there ought to be."

"Jemmy! That is really naughty. Now listen. G-i-g spells gig. Say it after me."

"G-i-g, jig," observed Jemmy, gazing out of the window with a heart longing after green fields.

Fresh remonstrances from Daisy; ever increasing obstinacy on the part of Jemmy.

A lively argument began, in which the unfortunate syllable was shuttlecocked to and fro between them, Jemmy stoutly holding to it that his system was the most reasonable, when hark!—

That was the drawing-room door at last, and Mrs. Dimity's step ascending in its limp, listless way, as usual.

Daisy's heart beat a tattoo. Polly stood still, in the act of administering a cuff to Bobby.

The door opened, and their stepmother's meek long face looked in with the smile of one whose modest claims as to the respectability of her family had been recognised.

"I have laid the whole matter before your father, my dears, and he says——" ("Oh! why can't she be quick?" mentally ejaculated the sisters)—"he says . . . that he sees, after all, no positive objection to your going to stay with my second cousin."

Great joy!

Daisy instantly flew to give her stepmother a kiss, who presented a long-suffering cheek for that purpose. Polly clapped her hands. The tribe, not knowing the cause of rejoicing, but ready to join in any excitement, made sundry ecstatic noises, whilst Jemmy relieved his feelings by shrieking "G-i-g, jig!" several times unreproved.

Then they all clamoured for a holiday.

"Oh, yes, let them off for to-day," pleaded Polly. "There is so much to think of, you know, for Daisy has only three days to prepare."

"Yes, and what shall I wear?" dismally added Daisy, one difficulty no sooner surmounted than a fresh one, like a still higher hill, appeared rising before her.

Mrs. Dimity agreed to the dismissal of the scholars, resignedly—indeed, in her own way she was one of the kindest-intentioned of women, though cheerfulness was an effort to her.

So, left in peace, with the schoolroom emptied of all its turbulent inhabitants, the three ladies sat down to hold a severe feminine committee on what articles of dress Miss Dimity must take to Marstown—above all, to discuss the make of that ethereal robe in which she must float before

the admiring eyes of Jack and his brother officers on the great occasion of their regimental ball.

(What shall we wear? Is not that the first tremendous question to nine-tenths of British girls on hearing of any gaiety to come? The remaining tenth may be too rich, or too blue, or too hoydenish, or too slovenly to share the feeling.)

Luckily—most luckily—Madame Furbelow, of the adjacent town, had come back from Paris (so she declared) a month ago, bringing one exquisite, white, model ball-gown, which had been admired by all that lady's customers; surreptitiously copied; but not bought—oh, dear, no! for balls were rare, indeed, in that bucolic land, and money, though plentiful enough, was more soundly invested; so Madame Furbelow's gown bade fair to remain on her hands.

"But, now, your father says I may drive in and buy it for you," said Mrs. Dimity, losing all her melancholy at the interesting prospect of shopping. "I told him it was dreadfully dear, but a bargain—lined with Bonnet's white silk, you know—and he said he might as well 'go the whole hog' when he was about it. Very rude of him."

"Very good of him."

The sentences jostled against each other; but, as they all understood each other, no one stopped to give explanations.

Everybody knew the model gown in these parts, and what it cost; but it would strike the beholders in Marstown as something quite new, all three agreed.

"Well, if you two drive over this afternoon, I'll walk to tell the laundress," said Polly, magnanimously. The squire's hired household being modest enough in number, the family employed a cottager's wife to wash, who lived a mile away, down long dusty lanes. "I'd better tell her to put ever so much more starch in your cotton gowns," remarked Polly, with a thoughtful demeanour. "It gives one an air of far greater consequence."

"You have not got a really handsome lace handkerchief for the ball?" considerately observed Mrs. Dimity, adding, with a supreme effort of good-nature, "Well, I will lend you my wedding one. It was a present from my Aunt Jones, and cost three pounds fifteen shillings, so you'll have to be very careful of it."

Was there ever such a pearl of price of a stepmother? Daisy interrupted her with voluble thanks and assurances of so guarding the existence of that handkerchief that, if she kept her promise strictly, it was extremely unlikely that she would enjoy herself at all on the night of the ball in question.

"And I'll lend you my new hat," quoth Polly, not to be outdone in generosity.

But Daisy demurred before accepting such a sacrifice. Had not Polly lumped the little last all of her quarterly allowance on that hat, which was "the sweetest thing" at Madame Furbelow's? Had not the elder Miss Dimity, sighing in admiration, acknowledged she could not afford such another, her accounts being too delicately balanced? —and debt representing itself to the sisters as an abyss of awfulness even blacker (because unknown) than to the good squire's mind.

But Polly insisted, and gained the day. Was there ever such a sister?—Far above rubies!

"Some other time you can, maybe, do as much again for me," said the younger, with an awkward laugh, not wanting to pose as a benefactress.

"Yes, indeed. Some day or other, if your sister is married, she may lend you something smart when you come out, Polly," responded Mrs. Dimity, so animated that she felt inclined to joke in some mild way; although at that the two young sisters shyly drew back, being fastidiously sensitive on such subjects.

The good lady was not fastidious, but still too much of a gentlewoman to utter the thought in her mind—that had, indeed, reigned supreme there ever since Jack's all-important letter came—which was, that maybe Daisy might meet her future husband at Marstown. As a stepmother, Mrs. Dimity indeed feebly hoped it might be so. Of course nobody—no girl, she owned—could be more useful to her little stepbrothers than Daisy.

That was very true.

On the other hand, was it not aggravating for a person of Mrs. Dimity's undecided appearance as to age to have such a grown-up stepdaughter?

Strangers had absolutely been rude enough to suppose her to be Mrs. Dimity's own daughter. So ridiculous!

"Daisy—Daisy!" the squire was now heard shouting.

"Are you not going to exercise old Slug? If you don't, I must; and I don't like to leave that hay. If John has to drive your stepmother over to buy your fal-lals this afternoon, it'll be as much as he can do with the horses."

"Yes—yes; I'm coming, papa. (Are *bouillonnés* or box pleats most worn, I wonder?)"

"Let me go! But oh, there are two hens to be set with Brahma eggs this morning, and a brood of young Cochins coming out!" offered Polly, hesitatingly; her heart being just now in the hen-wife's profession.

"Never mind; I'll ride Slug, dear. Indeed I like it," gaily answered Daisy, fairly dancing out of the room.

Slug was the squire's old brown hunter; most cunning and lazy of equine animals when allowed his own way. But Daisy felt she would make him go her way to-day, and so get rid of some of the excitement that made her heart feel like a volcano of delight, without any escape-valve in the way of a crater.

Up and down, between the green hedges that skirted Elm Hall, she softly exercised Slug; and, while the birds sang in the boughs that brushed her cheek at moments or interlaced overhead, they all seemed to her chanting the same refrain in different ways, of which the burden was something like,

Delight!—delight!—delight!—delight . . . . ful!

in a prolonged twitter. They too, like Daisy, loved the thought of music and movement. They, too, loved change, the essence of life; but they had it. For they could wander from wood to wood; fly to sunny lands, when it was winter here. But Daisy had never left home before further than to stay in the adjacent shire once or twice with some old maiden aunts; so no wonder the young girl was inexpressibly happy.

Visions of balls, of delightful partners, also rose in her little brain, as impalpable but delicious as the scent of the hawthorn in the hedges beside her; romantic possibilities—— This was only pure nature!

If, as Tennyson sings,

> In the spring a livelier iris changes on the burnish'd dove;
> In the spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love.

And why not much more the thoughts of a young maiden?

But still, even in this blissful dreaming, a remembrance of other days, of those visits in past childhood (two or three years ago) to the old spinster aunts, rose in the little damsel's memory; and with a half self-reproachful, half self-ridiculing sigh—such as that she had breathed on putting past for good and all her long-loved doll in a lavender-scented drawer, consecrated to similar cherished treasures that her infantile fancy had invested once with a real existence—with such a fond sigh she now said softly to herself: "Jerry Brown."

Now, who was Jerry Brown?

Certainly none of Miss Dimity's family or friends could have told, excepting young Polly, who knew a little on the subject.

That Polly knew very little, however, is inferred from the fact that she knew much less than her elder sister, who was sometimes secretly inclined to doubt whether she knew anything at all about him; excepting that she believed he had still a living existence on this earth, unlike the last doll, to whose primeval period his memory also belonged.

CHAPTER III.

> And as a lyoun he his lokying caste,
> Of fyve and twenty yeer his age I caste.
> His berd was wel bygonne for to sprynge;
> His voys was as a trumpe thunderynge.

The day of Miss Dimity's departure from her home had dawned at last.

There was the usual hurried breakfast known to all similar young travellers; the last cording of packages and labelling; a terrified outcry from Polly that something—the indispensable sash of some gown—was nearly forgotten.

Then the announcement from the squire that the fat old horses were impatient—(what a rarity!)—and must not be kept waiting. On which ensued hurried kisses from all the female members of the household, with outcries of: "You'll be sure and write, dear."

And Daisy, packed into the family coach, waving her hand, is off!

One may skip lightly over the incidents of the journey—how the fat guard was enormously feed by papa to look after her; how he locks her up accordingly in a first-class carriage alone with *Punch*, her tremors and anticipations, and an occasional stiff old lady. This, and the permission to get out at certain halting-places for refreshment—of which she was too nervous of being left behind to avail herself—constituted his severe duties till they reached the junction. Here, with a nudge, suggestive of more fees, he solemnly transferred her to the next fat guard.

How weary by afternoon little Miss Dimity grew of staring at the flying country, and of *Punch*, which she has read listlessly a hundred times; how dusty and more and more stiff hour by hour, till at last—could it be possible?—as she was nearing one station within three of the goal, she actually lay down her head, and before she realised the insinuating fact, was a prey to sleep.

How then, in a wild hurry, hearing "Marst'n" shouted, the little traveller woke up, and finding the train stopped at a tiny ticket-taking platform, quite forgot in which of the most safe recesses of her hand-bag her ticket was hidden. "Goodness, it's lost!" she ejaculated, in dismay, horror-stricken, as by the sound of his voice a stern porter was momentarily approaching. Then—how could she have put it there?—at the instant of utterly final despair it peered out of her purse, at which she did give a sigh of inexpressible relief.

What awful consequences would have ensued had it been really undiscoverable, were more than Daisy knew.

But before she had time to recover from the fright of the situation, or to rub her eyes wide awake, or to gather up her many wraps, the train had glided into the bustle and lights of the terminus. Some one flung the door wide, and Jack's gruff, beloved voice exclaimed:

"Well, little one, and how are you?"

Jack's manners not being at all gushing, this and a grasp which nearly wrings her fingers off, are the only tokens of brotherly affection he thinks it proper to bestow upon Daisy in public.

"Now you must introduce your sister to me, Mr. Dimity," says a motherly voice behind, and Daisy finds her hand most softly clasped by a tall lady, evidently once handsome.

As Jack complied by briefly uttering, "Daisy, this is Mrs. Cox. Mrs. Cox—here she is," the tall lady smiled upon them both benignly, and retained her hold of Daisy's hand, whilst Jack, who dearly liked a little command, promptly began seeing to his sister's luggage.

"You are most welcome, my dear, most welcome! both for your stepmother's sake and your brother's, whom we have got to know and like so very much—so very much —yes, indeed, so *very much*," said Mrs. Cox, gently repeating her pressure of Daisy's hand at each reiteration of the regard of her family for Jack.

What a comfortably warm, yet not too overpowering manner of reception Mrs. Cox had. Daisy, who till then had been quite frightened at the idea of being among strangers for the first time, now felt almost inclined to nestle up beside her hostess.

Then Jack returned: and they all three got into a fly, which presently drove up to a house that showed more lights than its neighbours, in a rather dark, wide road, bordered with villas, mostly owning a yard or two of shrubbery.

It was one of those little houses, built nowadays wherever stone is cheap, with so much adornment of mullioned window and variety in coping-stones, and the way in which the steps zigzag to the door—that one nearly forgets their comparative insignificance of size. All the villas showed much diversity of taste. But this one, though only standing on very little land besides its own foundations, was proud of a glass shanty stuck to its side, which was called "the conservatory."

"Welcome, my dear, to Magdala Villa," said Mrs. Cox.

Jack now jumped out of the carriage, and, having rung the bell, promptly declared he must say good-bye to them both, having to hurry back to barracks to entertain a friend at dinner.

"Won't you come in and see the girls a moment? They will be quite disappointed," remonstrated Mrs. Cox, insinuatingly.

Three female heads, or rather shadows of heads, could be distinctly descried peeping under the blind.

But Jack intimated that time did not allow of his having that pleasure, with a hardheartedness at which Daisy was somewhat hurt and disappointed. For she did want badly to see him a minute or two alone; to get away from the

Cox family, it might be, a moment, to give him a good hug; and to tell all the news of Elm Hall, of Polly, the squire, and the rest of the family.

But it might not be, plainly, this evening.

Mrs. Cox softly uttered many expressions of hospitable regret that Mr. Dimity could not stay and take pot-luck with them; and Jack hurriedly thanked her as often for her awful goodness.

Daisy strained her eyes after her brother's beloved young form going quickly away in the darkness; and the evening's pleasure was all damped to her thenceforth. She only vaguely seemed to know that she came into a bright-lit little entry; next that three girls crowded round her with welcome, and sympathy for her supposed fatigues.

Then she was taken upstairs to a tiny bed-room, and begged not to change her dress, but to come down as she was, as soon as she had somewhat tidied herself, for tea.

"For we thought that would most refresh you after your journey, so mamma ordered it," said that Miss Cox whom the guest supposed to be the eldest, because she was tallest, and had the sharpest little nose, upturned just at the tip, and seemed to take possession of the tired traveller more entirely.

"Do *you* always have late dinner at Elm Hall? Generally! Oh, dear, how unfortunate! Then you won't like tea; and I am afraid now it is too late to get you dinner."

Shocked at herself for thus appearing troublesome and fine, Daisy hastened to assure her hostesses that she constantly went to school-room tea instead of dinner. In her anxiety, she almost declared she adored school-room tea; a horrible fib, the fact being that she only took it to relieve poor Polly from presiding always over the orgies of the sons of Gad.

On going downstairs again, Daisy was immediately ushered into the said repast of tea, poached eggs and marmalade, bacon and Sally Lunn, salad and honey (thus her weary mind mixed them up together in a queer jumble). After a little she became able to remark more clearly all around her; till then her head had felt quite swimming and stupid.

At the tea-tray Mrs. Cox presided with elegance, filling

the cups in due order; the strongest and best to the guest; then to the doctor and to the girls; last to herself.

The doctor sat smiling at the foot of the table, a fat little man with a red face, a very bald head, a large mouth, and a big bunch of seals on his watch-chain. He made a capital foil to his wife; was always rubbing his hands and smiling on Daisy, till the breadth of his smile and his whole appearance made her think of a beneficent frog.

The three young ladies were very much alike, and rather pretty in the stranger's tired sight. They had all three very yellow hair, rosy and white skins, little pug noses, and a merry manner; as yet their distinguishing characteristics were not very apparent.

"Miss Dimity, have you made out the difference between my girls yet?" cried the little doctor gaily. "This is Fuzzy, my eldest, whose real name is supposed to be——"

"Hold your tongue, papa. It is such an ugly name. Nobody here knows it, and I'm not going to give the other Marstown girls such a pull over me," ejaculated the young lady.

Subsequently Daisy discovered that Miss Cox had been baptised Martha.

"Well, well—and this is Pussy, my second hope and joy," chuckled the little doctor, continuing his description. "Her real name is—bless me, if I don't forget!"

"Letitia, papa," said the second Miss Cox, with even more softness and silkiness of manner than her mother.

"Yes, and this is our youngest, the baby of the family, at least, of the girls, who are my favourites—eh, Birdie—the spoiled child, are you not? Speak up for yourself," chirped the doctor, pointing with his tea-spoon at the last of his daughters.

"Oh, papa, get out!" ejaculated the young lady, in a sprightly tone of answering raillery; and Daisy remarked, with slight surprise, that this was the one she had supposed to be eldest, because of her tyrannical small nose, and her peculiar appropriation of the guest.

Mrs. Cox now began describing to her husband and daughters the manner of Jack's introduction of his sister to her: but did it in such a gentle, laughing way, as if she liked the young man's gruffly honest manner, that the little

sister, with all her feathers ever ready to be ruffled in Jack's defence, felt quite pleased.

"I admire so much that decided tone in which your brother speaks; it is such true martial (what's the word, papa?)—brevity, isn't it?" said Miss Pussy to the guest, in a languishing manner.

Daisy opened her big eyes rather wider than usual.

"Oh, no!" she said, in an explanatory tone. "Jack always had that way of speaking when he was quite a little boy. It's in the family. Old grandpapa had the same, and he was a"—(checking herself abruptly, as her grandfather's peaceful occupation in selling drapery rose to her lips)—"and he was not a soldier."

"You made a bad shot that time, Pussy," sarcastically observed the eldest Miss Cox.

And the youngest one, now trying what she could make of the subject in her turn, said, in an innocent way:

"But what a thorough soldier your brother is in looks, Miss Dimity! Such a good figure, and his shoulders so broad! Of course you think him very handsome, don't you? Sisters always do. And I declare I admire him very much myself!" And she laughed a pretty childish giggle.

"Birdie," said Mrs. Cox, "you are a silly baby."

And Daisy, who was very unused to receiving compliments upon any of her family, and who looked upon all the members thereof as being part and parcel of herself, felt immensely flattered; but blushed and looked down on her plate.

Well, really she and Polly did think dear Jack good-looking, but they had never thought the rest of the world would do so, she murmured. In truth, Jack was of a dumpy, sturdy little make, with small eyes, sleek dark hair, and not a hair on his face, that, though so young in appearance, and kindly-featured enough, yet seemed made of cast iron, so determined was his lower jaw.

"Ah! you see, Miss Dimity, you didn't know your goose was considered a swan by outsiders, did you?" slily said the little doctor.

"Well, for my part, I don't know that he is a beauty, but he looks as hard as nails, and that's what *I* like," struck in the eldest Miss Cox, striking the table at the same time with a spare spoon in an off-hand way, as a signal to her mother to rise and have done with the meal.

When poor Daisy rose, however, she felt so giddy she had to hold by her chair a moment. On being questioned by the little doctor, the amazing fact was elicited that, though she had been given a basket of good things (packed by the very own hands of their darling old cook) for her consumption on the journey, and though the guard had offered to free her from captivity frequently to get refreshment, yet, between excitement and nervousness, Miss Dimity positively had eaten nothing all day.

She was promptly swooped on, and carried off to bed. Miss Cox declared that this was a case for herself; being very fond of exercising her love of command on any patient. She ordered off her father, telling him his great mind need not exercise itself on such little matters (adding, *sotto voce*, that "men ought not to meddle in such things"); she ordered off her mother, saying, "You know you are not a doctor; but I take after papa."

She would have even ordered off her sisters. But Pussy declared she felt that what poor little Miss Dimity most needed was sympathy, and would by no means be turned out of the latter's bed-room. And Birdie, popping in after them, declared if the others were there so would she come in too.

"For you know, Mr. Dimity is most my friend; so you ought to be most my friend too. You needn't look, Pussy —he is! And we are nearest of an age, dear, too. I may call you dear, may I not? Oh! you poor dear, I must give you a kiss to say good-night, mayn't I?"

Whereupon Daisy, who was standing among them like a little wren with wet feathers, so miserable and sleepy she felt, was seized upon by Miss Birdie, and kissed, or rather pecked at, not once, but half-a-dozen times.

"Now it's my turn," put in Miss Pussy, jealously; and, not to be outdone, she likewise embraced the captive, nearly smothering her with osculatory tenderness.

"I declare it is too bad not to let you go to bed; you look so tired, just like a little owl with big eyes, only ever so much prettier than any owl. But you darling"—(by that daring word she nearly utterly extinguished Birdie's claims to warmest friendship)—"you look so sweet and nice, I must just kiss you again."

The guest, with a heartfelt sigh, wished she would not. But again Pussy and Birdie began, as energetically as ever.

"It is a shame," said Miss Cox, rather grimly, holding out her hand and giving Daisy's soft fingers a grasp that wrung them in very favourable comparison, as to strength, with Jack's grip of affection. "So that's all I'll bother you with. Come off, girls; don't be worrying her any more, like two cats at a mouse. Good night."

Left alone in delicious privacy, Daisy slowly recovered. As she brushed out her hair, she wondered to herself whether the gushing scene she had just been put through, was attributable to the Misses Cox having been at school. (The squire never would allow herself and Polly to go to school, declaring he liked home-bred girls best, so had governesses for them.)

Jack, she remembered, used often to make a joke of school-girls, their violent friendships and petty quarrels, he said, and propensity for falling in love. Jack knew, because there had been a young ladies' seminary close to his school; and many a surreptitious note from vainly enamoured damsels had that hard-hearted young man been supposed to receive; though, being reticent by nature, neither Polly nor Daisy, with all their coaxing and caresses, could ever extract the contents of those *billets-doux* from him.

CHAPTER IV.

Mistress Matrossa hopes to be a lady,
Not as a dignity of late expected,
But from the time almost she was a baby,
That hath your richest gentlemen rejected;
But yet, not dubbed at present as she should be,
Lives in expectance still—my Lady Would-be.

Breakfast was somewhat late next morning in Miss Dimity's opinion.

Not too late indeed for her, refreshed as she needed to be by a long night's rest, but later even than at Elm Hall, where lazy comfort was the order of the day. She came down with eager punctuality, for was not this the first day of her first visit in the great world?

Entering the room, Daisy fancied she saw Mrs. Cox herself dusting the china ornaments; but that lady whisked

her duster, or whatever it was, so quickly into a cupboard that her young guest was not sure, especially as the hostess had quite a languid demeanour, though she held out both her hands with warmth.

"You are in excellent time, my dear; and I hope, I do hope you are quite rested. Yes? That is nice; that is so nice. Shall you and I sit down to a cosy breakfast together, for my girls are terribly late? And sometimes I have to take Birdie's breakfast up to her bed, or she would get none."

"Oh, mamma! how can you? How naughty of you!" laughed Birdie from the door, with the cooing manner of a reproachful young dove.

"Yes, don't tell tales out of school," cried Fuzzy behind her; and all the girls trooped in, as neat as you please.

Mrs. Cox smiled on her family, but suppressed a yawn herself with rather lackadaisical grace.

"Is it not rather early for you? Did you sleep long enough yourself, Mrs. Cox?" asked her guest, with quick sympathy.

"I, my dear—oh, I have been up several hours ago. I could not stay longer in bed of a morning. The doctor has to get his breakfast before anyone, and my two little boys have to be sent to school."

"Oh, mamma is never tired. She is up by six every morning," exclaimed all the girls in chorus, with a general surprise. "We could never do it. We take after papa; but mamma is wonderfully tough."

If tough, Mrs. Cox looked tired.

The breakfast was not, by any means, so abundantly-spread a meal as had been the late tea on the previous night. Indeed, most of the component parts of the latter were recognisable again. Still, though frugal, it was very carefully laid out. It contrasted quite favourably, in Daisy's easily-pleased opinion, with their own lavish one at home, whereat Mrs. Dimity was never able to quell the gambols of her offspring, who, with youthful extravagance, generally ended by pouring ample libations of tea or jam on the table-cloth, apparently to their private tutelary deities, or by making a sacrifice of some of the china.

"Miss Dimity has not had an egg. I am sure she would like an egg," suddenly cried Birdie, watching their guest's plate. "Mamma, I must order her a boiled egg. Fuzzy, you're nearest the door; run down to the kitchen."

"Oh yes, my dear. Only isn't it rather late?" replied Mrs. Cox gently, with a faint flush.

Daisy began to say she did not really want one; but Fuzzy had vanished.

"There isn't another egg in the house," soon proclaimed Fuzzy, putting in her head again. "Mary Jane says so."

"Oh, nonsense, my dear; there must be dozens. How could Mary Jane say such a thing?" uttered poor Mrs. Cox, trying to hide annoyance, and looking meaningly at her daughter. "Go down, and tell her I said so."

Fuzzy went down again, grumbling. But before she returned, being apparently delayed, Daisy had cheerfully finished her breakfast, seeing nothing amiss, and only grieved that her expostulations against the egg had been utterly disregarded by Birdie.

Then they went upstairs to the drawing-room, like a flight of young doves to their cote. How bright and brand-new all the furniture was—indeed the Coxes had only come to Magdala Villa since two or three months—but how stiff, compared with Elm Hall! It was all an upholsterer's complete walnut-wood set, with a dozen high chairs standing stiffly about. There were two shining big tables that scorned embroidered covers, and there was a new piano—locked; but there was not a book lying about, save two big photo-books—likewise locked. Not a flower, work-box, magazine, puzzle, knick-knack, or needle-worked piece of embroidery of any kind. Mrs. Cox said with pleasure she had got it new and tidy, and wished to keep it so; as she truly tried to do.

Alas! it was a wet morning. Flatten their faces as they might against the window-panes, plainly the leaden sky meant to stream down a continuous pour of rain. Daisy owned with a sigh they must give up hopes of seeing the town that morning, as the girls had promised, and as herself had eagerly wished they should do. Marstown was the first large town she had ever been in, and her imagination supposed it to be a little London, with a strong red-pepper sprinkling of military. (The last, no doubt, highly agreeable; but that might be as likely to take away the breath of a simple little country person like herself as cayenne always did.)

"Indeed, dear, it is not much of a town for shops or sights," said Pussy consolingly. "Let us sit in the drawing-

room till lunch-time, and have a real good chat. We never go out till after lunch anyway, because we never meet any of them till afternoon."

"Any of them?" repeated Daisy, inquiringly.

"Why, any of the *officers*, to be sure!" burst out all the young ladies.

"Oh!" replied Daisy, suddenly enlightened; and blushing she did not quite know why, except that the manners and customs of all the world but those of the denizens of Elm Hall were unknown to her, and she was always afraid of making some blunder. "You mean the officers of the 160th."

"Your brother's regiment. Oh, no doubt you think the sun rises and sets only on them, like Birdie here; but that's more than *I do!*" cried Fuzzy, affecting a fast and careless air, though with the colour deepening in her cheeks. "Now, I'll back the 170th to give them pounds any day and win in a canter."

(Give them pounds!—the little guest privately wondered what they should do that for, but carefully suppressed her ignorance.)

"Is there any other regiment here but Jack's?" asked Daisy; which naïve question was received with a scream of laughter from the three Miss Coxes. She was really too deliciously countrified, they agreed.

Thereupon all three sisters settled down to have a good chat, as they called it, for the whole morning, to open the visitor's mind. Daisy, in spite of her attempted remonstrance, was forced to recline upon half of the sofa; while Pussy, with one arm round her waist, occupied the remainder of it. Birdie seated herself on a stool, however, where, with her elbow in her new-found friend's lap (and a sharp little one it was, too!), she gazed up lovingly, to the guest's secret discomposure, in her face.

"What! want your work! Oh, no! dear Miss Dimity, indeed you don't want it," they cried, scouting a small, industrious proposition made by their young guest. "One can't talk half so well if one is stitching."

"Well, I mean to work," quoth Fuzzy, decidedly, seating herself at a little table, to embroider a pair of slippers—foxes' heads, with glass eyes, on a scarlet ground. Her sisters gave a fresh little shriek of mirth. "Oh! but Fuzzy is finishing those slippers for her admirer, Major

Hodge. He's in the Queen's Own Freebooters. The regiment is to leave the end of this week, and poor Fuzzy is very much gone on him, so we don't envy her. What big feet he has, Fuzzy!" cried her sisters gaily, or rather Birdie did so.

Pussy, though she joined in the laugh at the major's feet, had sighed herself when she spoke of the regiment's departure. Fuzzy tried to join in the mirth, but turned away her head, so that only Daisy saw accidentally that her face looked rather miserable, while she observed, staring out:

"Look, there is mamma going marketing. What an old frump she is, in that waterproof and goloshes! Why she won't send Mary Jane instead beats me hollow."

Daisy, indeed, to her amazement, saw the elegant Mrs. Cox stealing out in a costume that much reminded her of their own washerwoman in wet weather.

But her attention was called off by the young ladies, who were volubly explaining that there were three regiments in Marstown; only one, the "fine 15oth," was "too fine" for them. "Men who only go out 'in the county,' if you please," mimicked Birdie, in a mincing voice. Then came the 16oth, or "Strappers," simply known hitherto to Daisy as "Jack's regiment," which embodied all its claims to distinction in her mind. Lastly, there was the 17oth, soon to depart, in which, besides the heartbroken Major Hodge, Pussy likewise had a well-beloved swain, a rather youthful lieutenant. "But she is wiser than Fuzzy, for she has begun to transfer her affections to some one in the 16oth. She has her eye on Captain Gascoigne," went on the ingenuous Birdie.

"Now, Birdie, I have not settled yet on Captain Gascoigne. I know what you are driving at. You want to make me say I'll have him and give up somebody else, who likes me just as much, and I believe far better than he does you," angrily returned Pussy, getting red.

"He doesn't."

"He does."

"He doesn't."

"We'll see, my dear——"

"Yes, my dear, so we shall," sarcastically.

The quarrel was getting hot. But then both sisters, by common consent, looked at Daisy—and were silent. The latter felt uncomfortable at this, although the girls now

smiled with apparent gaiety at each other—for Daisy herself and Polly were heartily and even unusually attached to each other—so she hazarded a remark:

"Captain Gascoigne!—he is Jack's great friend, is he not? I remember, now, that Jack always said he was one of the best fellows in the world, or something like that, whenever he did speak of any of his brother officers; but he does not often."

"He may be one of the best fellows *with men*," put in Fuzzy, glancing up a moment from her work, at which she was toiling most industriously. "But he hates women, or is afraid of them, and never goes out to walk without a brother officer on each side of him to keep ladies off! He is said to be very rich, though; and so certainly Pussy and Birdie are wise in their generation—though *I* tell them they may as well let it alone."

"You, indeed!—much right you have to talk, Fuzzy! Why, I'd be ashamed to be your age and not have had a decent proposal yet," jeered her youngest sister, with a contemptuous laugh, and went on, turning to Daisy: "She has been out five years, and has done no good yet, as I told papa and mamma when they wanted to keep me in half a year longer to give her another chance. And Pussy has been out two years, so now it's high time I should try my hand at it."

At it!—at what? Daisy silently wondered. And why should one sister be kept in to give the others chances?

Miss Birdie went on, however.

"Now, I only came out last winter, and I'm making all the girls look alive, I can tell you. Such a set of old articles in the market as they are, as I told the Smeeths and Fuzzy the other day. Ha! ha! they were so angry, but I always say what I think—I'm such a spoiled little thing; and then I told them all they'd see I'd not be long on hand—*I'll* be married before the year is out!"

There was a silence on the part of both her sisters.

Daisy, too, could not say a syllable, feeling pained, and fearing to hurt one or other. Then poor Fuzzy, who had evidently a good heart, made a sound as if she was swallowing a dry sob of vexation, and replied:

"Well, Baby dear, I'm sure I'll be glad enough if you do better than I. Any way, you can't say I was unkind about preventing your coming out."

"Oh, no, you are a good old thing enough; though you could not have stopped me, if you had even tried, for papa always takes my part. I'm his pet, and he won't allow mamma to sit on me," graciously replied Birdie, with a little domineering nod.

Then Pussy, to change the subject, rather hastily began, with her most fawning manner:

"Now I wonder who Miss Dimity will fall in love with here? . . . Are you often in love, dear Miss Dimity? All the girls here are just always in and out of it. Why, I *do declare* she's blushing!"

With many caresses of the guest, and some laughter, they all declared she was really quite too refreshing; but as Fuzzy first observed, and the others agreed, it was a shame to torment her.

"Only I do—really—believe there is somebody. You darling, do just tell us what colour his hair is," coaxed Birdie, with her most *ingenue* air.

"No, indeed—no, really, you are quite, quite wrong. We never see anybody at Elm Hall. There is nobody at all—there never was—except——"

"Ah, ah! except—except——" cried the pack.

"Except when I was quite a child, some years ago," uttered poor Daisy, firmly, though her fresh peach-cheeks became again tinged with crimson. "It was only somebody—I suppose I was really very young, but I thought him quite a grown man then—who had a fancy for me, and used to pet me very much."

They all looked at her rather curiously.

Birdie, who was short-sighted, put up her eyeglass, as if such a curiosity was worth study. But none of them said anything. Was it because they were all very deferential to the guest, and anxious, for hidden reasons, to please her; or because of that respect for innocence everyone naturally shows to children?

Not to waste time, however, Pussy produced an Army List, and proceeded to give instruction (of which she was, indeed, very capable) in the "Officers' Bible," as she profanely termed it. (The book fell open, significantly, of its own accord at the pages describing the gallant 150th, 160th, and 170th regiments.)

The sisters, as they read out the names of Her Gracious Majesty's faithful and devoted officers in the latter three corps, accompanied them by such a running fire of description

—that to Daisy's bewilderment, colonels, captains, and subalterns were soon jumbled together in her mind in undistinguishable confusion.

"Captain O'Donoghue. Is that the poor man whose wife has such dreadful flirtations with all the very young officers, you say?" she once timidly asked.

"He married? Catch him!—No—no. He is the wildest man in the British Army," explained Birdie. "What a muddle your poor mind is in, to be sure! I'll tell you what: she must take the 'Flirts' Guide' up to her bed-room, and study it every spare minute, or she'll be making frightful mistakes."

And the young lady went to get Daisy a little blue directory, which showed the names of all the officers then quartered in Marstown, with an asterisk affixed to the names of those married.

"It is simply invaluable!" she enthusiastically exclaimed.

"I really don't want it—I'd rather not," said Daisy, shyly withdrawing as Birdie officiously pressed it on her.

"Oh, but you must. You can't make us all blush, you know, by asking again about Mrs. O'Donoghue, when she isn't in existence. And it would be so naughty to see you talking too much to any married man; wouldn't it, Fuzzy? wouldn't it, Pussy? So there; and I've put the Army List—turned down at the right pages—in your workbox."

The rest of the morning was now devoted to gossip concerning the flirtations of some of the officers with the town young ladies. This, though (as Daisy feared at moments) it was rather like backbiting, or telling tales out of school, amused her very much; especially the stories told by Fuzzy, who had a good deal of clever humour.

At times Birdie would interrupt in her wood-quest's, cooing tones by saying, "Oh, shall I tell her such and such a tale?" but was generally stopped by a look of silent warning from one of the others, which passed quite unnoticed over little Miss Dimity's head.

Everything was so new to her; and everybody so kind. It was uncharitable to judge anybody else as uncharitable, she thought, and so put the best construction on all she had heard said by her hostesses that morning.

Nevertheless, when Daisy went up to wash her hands before lunch, it was with a curious sated feeling, as if her mind had been asked to digest a good deal of mental stale jam-tart or some such other palling sweetstuff.

CHAPTER V.

Had we ever a cousin, Tom!
Did your cousin happen to sing?
Sisters we've all by the dozen, Tom,
But a cousin's a different thing.

LUNCHEON at the Coxes was really a mid-day dinner, beginning with mutton broth, and ending with oranges and ginger nuts.

Daisy was privately astonished, however, to see the incomprehensible looks with which the Cox girls regarded their mutton as they sat down to it.

"Mamma, I told you Miss Dimity always has her dinner at home," Birdie at length burst out with in a petulant tone of surprised anger.

"My dear, I was sure that Miss Dimity would prefer not to change your habits and hours; and that she would not mind taking tea in the evening with us quiet people," gently insinuated Mrs. Cox, with a ring of firmness under all her softness of tone.

Of course Daisy warmly agreed, thanking Mrs. Cox for her good opinion.

"But you must think it so vulgar of us," said Pussy, with a heightened colour.

How why one dinner or late tea should be made a question of gentility, was more than Daisy could see. Being a great little housekeeper, she knew it was a question of economy; but she would have thought shabbiness should have been left to Mrs. Cox having dinner for the guest, if tea was more suited to her means. Daisy disliked tea; but that was another matter, and she shrewdly hid the feeling.

After the meal the new-comer, to her infinite satisfaction, was taken out to see the town.

In summer, while she was gazing with delight at the shop windows and interest at the public buildings, the Misses Cox kept their eyes exclusively directed on the passers-by, in the hope of meeting friends. At last, as they turned into a quiet street, there was a little flutter of delight, and they all exclaimed

"There is your brother, Miss Dimity! How good of you to come!" in fact as we appreciated

"Well, not so very," replied that young man, in his gruffly honest manner, that never was at pains to flatter anybody, but just told the truth, letting people take it or leave it as they liked. "As this is my sister's first day here it would not be very good of me if I didn't come."

Thereupon the Cox girls, declaring they would do "the correct thing," insisted on departing, leaving brother and sister to talk together a few minutes.

"Well, little one," then cried Jack pleasantly, "tell us all about the old place. How are the governor, and the mum, and all the rest of them?"

So at once Daisy's tongue was loosened, and they had a glorious talk; whilst she described everything that had happened to everybody at home, even to the personal appearance of each of the old black setter's new puppies.

"Well, and how do you like staying with the Coxes, and what do you think of them?" went on Jack at last.

Oh! Mrs. Cox herself was charming—she deserved only ecstatic praise; and in the delight of having Jack to herself, and thinking how much prospective pleasure they both owed to the family, the Cox girls came in for almost equal enthusiasm from Daisy's voluble little tongue.

Of course she could not say to a man—even to her brother—that in some little ways the girls were not quite what seemed to her refined and high-minded—as regarded all that fun about Major Hodge, for instance.

Jack would not have understood—would have said that girls always found fault with each other. And Daisy did not like to repeat anything; and was, besides, too easily delighted to find fault with anybody.

So they rejoined the others, Jack in silent but vast satisfaction that the invitation to his sister, which he had procured—on his honour, now, he did not know how (we may wonder if Mrs. Cox knew)—had turned out such a capital plan.

As they came up it was evident that Pussy had met her admiring swain in the 170th; who was so soon to lead his flock, *i.e.* the men of his company, to pastures new.

Mr. Jones was a stout young man of bovine appearance, especially as to his black eyes, which stared at Pussy quite unmoved, despite all that damsel's attempts to rouse his emotions—*l'agacer*, as the French have it. At present he was seated placidly on a bench, watching a spider eat a fly

in a bush; whilst Pussy, with little screams of horror, was slapping his hand lightly, and calling him a hard-hearted horrid wretch.

"Here is Mr. Dimity. He will be more gallant," she uttered appealingly. "Oh, Mr. Dimity, do save this poor darling little fly. I couldn't bear to touch it myself; and Mr. Jones won't."

"Now, nonsense, Pussy. The spider wants his dinner —I know he does—and if Mr. Dimity takes it away from him I shall cry," plaintively expostulated Birdie, with such a childlike petulance in her accents that both the gentlemen burst out laughing at her.

"What am I to do between both of you? All I can do is to go away," said Jack, looking from one to the other.

"Yes, do; and I'll go with you," replied Birdie, stealing one covert glance of triumphant victory at her sister.

For Pussy, forsooth, wanted to play off one gentleman against the other. "And I hadn't a notion of her doing that with my property," thought Birdie.

For some time these two "sorted couples," as Fuzzy briefly described the young ladies and their respected cavaliers, strolled through the gardens; while Miss Cox devoted herself to entertaining Daisy—doing it, too, with such goodwill that the latter liked her very much indeed.

"But now it is time to go home; for there are some of the other men coming in to tea," said Fuzzy at last. "You and I have been sacrificing ourselves long enough doing 'gooseberry' to these others."

"I didn't know it was a sacrifice. I am so sorry if you found it so, for I like hearing you talk very much," said truthful Daisy.

Miss Cox looked at her, and said:

"Dear—I like you!"

Now, how that was meant Daisy could not determine, for she had heard Jack use the term in a slang sense, signifying, "I don't believe a word you say." And Fuzzy said it with a curious intonation that might have been sarcastic, or really might have been grave reality.

There was no time to ask, for just now they had all turned out of the gardens into the street again, and a drove of tired cattle being driven to the butcher came by.

All the cattle had passed before Birdie came out, except

one stray calf, which a little boy was now hallooing after the others. A difficult task, as the poor young creature sometimes refused to stir from fright.

Birdie, being supposed to be very short-sighted, put up her eyeglass; and, descrying the monster, at once gave a little scream.

"Oh, a cow! I am so much afraid of a cow! Oh, Mr. Dimity—oh, let me run back; I won't face it!"

Mr. Jones, not being in love with Miss Birdie, laughed in a dull quiet way; the sisters jeered; Jack remonstrated.

"Come along, Miss Cox. Nonsense—look at it boldly; it's not a cow."

"Oh, but I can se-e it is"—with a fresh tiny scream; "it's a dreadful cow."

"I tell you it's not a cow; it's a calf."

"Oh! a calf. Well, but no matter, it will be a cow!"

And thereupon back rushed Miss Birdie helter-skelter to the shelter of the gardens.

Jack, after hesitating amid much laughter, naturally had to go after her to escort her back; though, as Fuzzy drily told him, she would come of her own accord very likely, if they left her alone.

These two thus followed the rest of the party home, at some distance behind; defeating thereby any hopes that Fuzzy or poor Daisy might have had as to getting any share of Master Jack's company.

As to little Miss Dimity, she was silent; at moments rather losing herself in speculations as to why Birdie, who had seemed to domineer over all the household that morning, should be so babyish and meek in the afternoon.

Also, was it not strange that Jack should treat the three Miss Coxes in such a free-and-easy fashion—his voice having no shade of respect, but a hail-fellow tone all through it? He certainly spoke often in that way to Polly at home when she "cheeked" him, as he called it; but his eldest young sister herself was a damsel of some dignity, and exacted and really received much deference from all her brothers, although they might tease about her plumpness of person.

Arrived home, they all burst into the drawing-room.

"Well, mamma! have you tea ready for us? Oh dear! it is not made yet. What a lazy person you are!"

"It is hardly time yet, indeed, my dears. Here are the

Miss Smeeths, do you see? They have been sitting, with only me to entertain them, for a quarter of an hour," said Mrs. Cox gently.

The Cox girls thereupon rushed at two strange young ladies who were sitting by with a demure expectant air—as if, indeed, they considered that talking to their hostess formed no part at all, and could not even be looked on as a beginning of the entertainment they awaited.

"Oh, dears, we are awfully sorry," cried the Misses Cox, kissing them and patting their visitors' shoulders; "but the truth is, we forgot all about you, or what o'clock it was, when we were in the gardens."

One Miss Smeeth on this cleared her throat with a very significant "Hem, hem!" The other answered: "We see —too well engaged."

And this she did in such a loud tone, laughing and nodding at Jack as she spoke, that Daisy, who stood by, felt inclined to redden, and hoped he did not hear. For, though she was his sister, Daisy was loyal to her own sex, and was distressed lest he should think the Coxes, or any girls, would "run after him," or after any men.

But Jack was quite unconcerned by what was going on between the girls, if, indeed, he heard.

He was paying his respects to Mrs. Cox in his own brusque fashion, and seemed to like talking to her very much, too; for, in her gentle, languid way, she was equally pleased, repaying the young man by flattery. It was very innocent flattery, only the praises of his little white terrier and his bigger Clumber spaniels. But, when she talked to young men, poor Mrs. Cox could hardly help speaking in a flattering tone.

"Listen to mamma! She doesn't know a thing about dogs! Not a thing!" burst in Fuzzy, whose interpolations generally acted like bomb-shells in scattering talkers. "Mr. Dimity! Mr. Dimity! I want to know, is the Smiler coming to tea, or is he not? Now, I'm sure you've forgotten to give him our message."

"Then you're wrong, Miss Cox, for once, let me tell you. Mr. Lee is coming by-and-by, and so is Captain Gascoigne; for I asked them both for you."

An outburst of jubilation followed. Jack went up to the top of the class in the Miss Coxes' opinion. To have made Captain Gascoigne come too, was so good of him.

Apparently, without such extraneous aid, they did not expect the latter gentleman to visit them.

"I don't quite understand—these names get so mixed in my head. Is Mr. Lee not a different person from Mr. Smiler?" asked Daisy, aside, of Miss Cox.

"Oh, dear, no. 'Smiler' Lee is only his nickname, because he is such a dear little creature, you know. He is the best dancer in the British army, too! So you thought there was a Mr. Smiler? What a joke! ha, ha! Here he is, coming up the steps, I do declare. I must tell him what you called him."

"Oh, no, don't—pray don't. Remember, he is a stranger to me," begged poor Daisy, in agony; and only succeeded in persuading Miss Fuzzy to abandon her design as the door opened to admit the subject of their remarks and Captain Gascoigne.

CHAPTER VI.

I saw him at the Duke Alençon's once;
And much too little of that good I saw,
Is my report to his great worthiness.
Ros.—Another of these students at that time
Was there with him; if I have heard a truth,
Biron they call him; but a merrier man,
Within the limit of becoming mirth,
I never spent an hour's talk withal.

Captain Gascoigne, who entered the room before his junior, was stared at by Daisy with both her eyes wide opened.

For this was Jack's best friend, though some years older than the latter; the everyday hero and the source of constant quotations of that young man.

Jack had, indeed, admitted that his friend Gascoigne was peculiar; retiring. But these admissions had been quite outdone by his far more frequent declarations of Gascoigne's being "the best fellow in the world," and so forth. While, whenever Jack had been invited to what old Squire Dimity called "swell houses," it had always been under the wing of his friend, so that Daisy was prepared to see "a glass of fashion, and the mould of form."

Daisy felt somewhat disappointed when she saw come in only a tall man, with a very quiet manner, dark brown hair, red, drooping moustache, and a heavy nose. Somehow, she had expected a paladin; some one as handsome as—as Waverley in Sir Walter Scott, or Adonis in "Mangnall's Questions;" brave as Bayard, noble as King Arthur (with the latter qualities quite visible in an indescribable way, of course).

She had heard too much in his praise beforehand, that was it.

But it was not so when she beheld the "Smiler," who followed Captain Gascoigne with the conscious look of feeling himself a sun beaming out from behind a cloud. He was a smaller, younger man, with the sleekest of sleek heads, best-waxed of moustaches; so trim and well made in figure, so faultlessly exquisite in dress.

Captain Gascoigne went straight to Mrs. Cox, and sat down to talk to her, dispersing Jack, unconsciously, with an air as if talking to his hostess was what he had especially come to do.

His gay young subaltern, on the contrary, made a dash for the group of girls, who received him joyously, and closed round him in a circle, of which he seemed to think himself, as they did, the natural centre.

"Ah, Miss Birdie, how well you are looking to-day! Well, Miss Pussy, what mischief have you been about lately? Flirting on the quiet, and nearly killing some more fellows, no doubt. What, the two Miss Smeeths here, heart-breakers! Poor Miss Fuzzy, I am so sorry for you. A certain regiment is going away, isn't it? I declare I must get out my handkerchief and help you to cry." And the young fellow verily did pull out his scented silk handkerchief, that in the shade of its border most successfully matched his crimson necktie.

The Smeeth girls, loudly laughing, cried: "Yes, yes; we'll all cry!" pulling out theirs also, that were much more coarse, and were better in former retirement.

"Trash! Stop talking nonsense a moment, Mr. Lee, and let me introduce you to Miss Dimity," answered Fuzzy, and on the instant Mr. Lee dropped the subject and his tone of banter; although he began addressing the newcomer as gaily as he had the others.

He gave Daisy the impression of having been uncon-

sciously acting ever since he entered the room. With all her determination to be very softly indignant and dignified (as a downy dab-chick might) when her sisterhood was lightly addressed, she felt that he had only been saying what he thought would best please everyone. It was all done so lightly—good-humouredly—one saw he was so anxious to be friends with the whole world, to please every living soul—that she must have been a sour female indeed who on first acquaintanceship had found fault with the Smiler when he tried to please.

Now, after interested questions as to her journey, some animated remarks, originated by Daisy, on the weather, and a little discussion upon the architectural appearance of Marstown, Mr. Lee said, sighing, with the same manner of being, unconsciously to himself, acting all the while:

"And so you are coming down for our ball? How jolly for Dimity to have a sister to bring down! I know I wish I had a sister. I do indeed, on my honour. Eh, old fellow," giving Jack a poke in the ribs; "do you hear? I am saying how lucky you are, aren't you, to have your sister?"

"She's an awful bother to look after," growled Master Jack in his deep voice, with a kindly glance at Daisy one brief moment all the same. For his affection took the form of "looking after" his sister; and in his way, if people understood it as Daisy did, he was very fond of her.

"You old growler, you ain't fit to have a sister—and such a sister, too!" jocularly scolded Mr. Lee, with an admiring glance at little Miss Dimity, which the other young ladies, though watching, absolutely did not resent. But then they knew Smiler could not help paying compliments any more than the sun can shining; and custom begat indifference in their minds. "Isn't he a growler, Miss Dimity? Do you know that is our name for him?" went on the young man. And Daisy, laughing heartily, agreed; privately amused, because, though she kept it dark, Jack's home nickname had been such a well-fitting one, that it had likewise suggested itself to the minds of his comrades-in-arms.

Just then Mr. Lee was borne lightly away from Daisy's side by a wave of chatter sent to dislodge him by the other young ladies; and Jack took the opportunity to say in Daisy's ear, with some dissatisfaction:

"I wish you had been introduced to Gascoigne. I must try to manage it. Mind you try to get friends with him; remember."

Even as Jack spoke Captain Gascoigne rose from Mrs. Cox's side, since two fresh guests had entered—one the irresistible O'Donoghue, reputed "the handsomest man in the British Army;" the other Major Hodge, whom Fuzzy affected.

Glancing a moment gravely at the group of young ladies, thinking that it was now perhaps his secondary duty to speak to his hostess's daughters, Captain Gascoigne decided in his own mind that they were too much occupied with the new-comers to need him; upon which, with undeviating directness, he walked straight across the room to where Jack and Daisy were together.

"Will you introduce me to your sister?" the latter heard him ask in an undertone. And then poor Daisy felt all in a flutter, for Jack looked so mightily pleased and flattered. Besides, he privately gave her a nudge with his elbow, by way of a reminder that she was to make herself expressly agreeable to his friend.

Now, in truth, Miss Dimity was somewhat in awe of her elder brother, but extremely fond of and anxious to please him.

Still, as she hysterically thought he might remember, she did feel such a countrified mouse, who had hardly ever spoken to any strange gentlemen in all her life—till she came to Marstown. And also Captain Gascoigne looked so grave and tall as she craned her head to look up at him—while she was a little person in a little chair—that, with all this and the vague knowledge that he went out in London in the season, and was a well-known hunting man, and visited at great houses, as she had been told—foolish as it may seem, she began to blush, and the more she tried not to do so the worse she grew.

Wildly trying to hazard a remark, unhappy Daisy stammered twice, and finally succeeded in observing:

"It's—it's a very fine day."

"Well, that is a very original remark of yours, Daisy—'a very fine day.' It is so," satirically put in Jack.

The poor little girl was covered with confusion, and, knowing Jack thought her a fool, felt a vast disposition to weep; whilst her brother looked down on her in brotherly

displeasure, and Captain Gascoigne with pity. Suddenly seating himself beside her, he said, good-naturedly:

"Well, do you know, Miss Dimity, though your brother may laugh at us, that is the very same remark I was about to make to you."

Whether this was within miles of the truth or not—Daisy believed it like gospel—it made everything smooth, and the three found themselves chatting quite gaily together; although, of course, Daisy had been much more at her ease with Mr. Lee, of whom nobody could stand in awe.

"What do you think of the belles of Marstown? There are two of them—the Misses Smeeth. Do you admire them very much?" Captain Gascoigne by-and-by asked, looking over, with an unmoved countenance, to where the youngest Miss Smeeth, a buxom, black-eyed gipsy, was sitting on a little table dangling her feet. Indeed, at times, as she grew excited in discoursing with Captain O'Donoghue, she was swinging them with a will.

"Well, no; not that one," Daisy hesitatingly said, with secret disapproval.

"What! not admire the fair Esther?" struck in Jack, in a terribly audible undertone. "I am surprised at you, old girl. Rank jealousy! What do you think of the eldest one, then—Miss Grace? 'Ease and Grace,' as they are called by some of us."

Captain Gascoigne gave him a cautioning look.

"I think she looks rather like a bone crochet-needle," laughed Daisy, utterly forgetting the presence of Captain Gascoigne, and answering Jack as she was used.

Both her hearers laughed too, for, as they looked across the room, the likeness was really most striking.

Miss Smeeth was tall, thin, and straight, but that her head was takingly drooped, which, with its pale hair, ivory complexion, and aquiline nose, suggested the comparison. Her gray dress, of an economically nondescript hue, suitable for all seasons, was fastened up the back by an outburst of buttons; and was as tight as tight could be round her thin figure—except that just above the knees a scarf of the same stuff was tied round, as if with the primary intention of adding some drapery. This attempt to disguise her form had plainly been repented of afterwards by the young lady, since the final effect was to make her look tighter than ever.

"I never saw such bad dressers in my life as the girls in Marstown. Did you?" observed Jack to his friend with bluntness, feeling stirred to talk freely by the unusual occurrence of being with his sister and friend in company. "It's my belief that girl hasn't another gown to put on her back. I've never seen her in any other, I know."

"Oh, come—though I hardly ever remark ladies' dresses—I think I have," replied Captain Gascoigne in a kindly though slow manner. "Surely, there was a black dress in which I have seen one——"

"Seen both in turns," interrupted Jack, with brutal frankness. "One wears it with blue ribbons, and the other with red on state occasions—the other one lies in bed that day. They fight about whose turn it is for a party: so some other young ladies, their dearest friends, confided to me, and box each other's——"

"Jack! you should be ashamed of yourself," interrupted Daisy, with flashing eyes. "It was a shame of any girl to tell you such things about another; and it is very unkind to laugh at their dress, for they must be miserably poor to have only one; and I think it is a great pity of them."

"Quite right, Miss Dimity. You had no idea, had you, that gentlemen were such terrible gossips?" said Captain Gascoigne, smiling at her.

"It's all very fine of you to come down on me like a cart-load of bricks; but who was it called Miss Smeeth a crochet-needle?"

"I'm very sorry now I did, then, Jack——"

Their conversation was suddenly stopped. Birdie was calling out, in a plaintive tone:

"I say, everybody, don't you all think it is very stuffy here? Let us have tea on the roof—Fuzzy, don't begin pouring it out here."

There ensued a clamour of voices; all the young ladies seconding the plan, as also the gay "Smiler," who was always ready for any kind of action. Poor Mrs. Cox, flushing slightly, kept objecting in faint murmurs.

"Oh, no, Baby dear—it was such a fuss last time! Pussy—remember that it gives Mary (the servant) so much more trouble! Fuzzy—you know there were so many tea-cups broken before!"

But she was utterly overborne.

The gentlemen, to do them all justice, preserved perfect

neutrality of expression till the dispute should be ended; except that big Major Hodge, shrugging his broad shoulders, observed in an undertone:

"Provided that I am not expected to carry anything!"

"Oh! you are always lazy!" exclaimed Birdie, turning upon him in contempt. "Let us carry the tea ourselves upstairs, girls. We needn't bother the servant, mamma. Mr. Lee, you'll help us?"

Lee sprang gallantly to aid the distressed damsel, who appealed plaintively to Jack also; the movement being indeed a ruse on her part to detach either Dimity or Gascoigne—"her men"—from their undue engrossment with Daisy.

The Cox mansion was thus built. On the first floor a little entry, dignified by the name of hall, with room for the umbrella-stand; to left the very moderately-sized dining-room; to right the lesser study, sacred to the doctor. Second storey: to left the drawing-room; to right Mrs. Cox's bed-room; on the landing, a case of stuffed humming-birds, in the dark corner, not to be looked at too closely, as rather touched by time or moths; still producing a good effect, Mrs. Cox hoped.

Higher up: the bed-rooms sacred to the Misses Cox, and to the guest.

Still higher: three attics, in which slept the three women-servants, and the two little Cox schoolboys, whom nobody but their mother much minded; in whose living existence many people almost disbelieved, since the doctor thought little boys of their age plagues.

From the landing here, a short ladder led to a trap-door opening on the roof, which was protected by the house-wall being built a little higher than the edge of the slates, to give the villa a more imposing air from the street. And up here, mounting the ladder, and squeezing through the trap-door, all the company went; laughing, pushing, carrying the tea-things, or dropping them in some instances.

CHAPTER VII.

So fast a friend, so foe to few,
So good to every wight,
I well may wish, but scarcely hope,
Again to have in sight.

Daisy was the last but one to mount the ladder to the roof. Captain Gascoigne was the very last.

He had shown an almost manifest reluctance to take his tea on the slates, as Daisy, who had been nearest to him, perceived; but the Cox girls were too excited, and the Smeeths too (femininely) uproarious to notice it.

"Here, Miss Dimity," cried one of the girls, as Daisy emerged, and found all the company sitting in a row on the sooty slates, with their feet in the lead gutter-pipe, while the top of the house-wall made a low breastwork before them, "as if on purpose to put one's cup on," declared Birdie. "Here, Miss Dimity, won't you come here, dear, between Miss Smeeth and me? We have kept a little corner for you. And won't you come here, Captain Gascoigne?"

"Here" meant beside Pussy; who was tired of Mr. Jones, since that excellent, dull youth merely gazed at her with expressionless black orbs, and kept silence generally; except that at times, after a violent heaving of his body being perceptible, he would give vent to a great rumbling laugh—the cause of which he generally refused to state.

But Gascoigne declared he was too tall to sit doubled up like the rest with comfort; and, politely adding that he would like to be in readiness to go down into the house below for hot water or anything needed, could not be induced to come up the ladder higher than just allowed him to put out his head and arms, and drink the tea which Pussy tenderly handed to him.

"You look like Jack-in-the-box! Doesn't Captain Gascoigne look a real muff stuck in the trap-door there, Mr. Lee?" jeeringly exclaimed Miss Grace Smeeth, who permitted herself as much freedom of tongue as her sister did ease of body. "Why can't he be nice and friendly like you, and come and join us?"

"Hush! Miss Smeeth. Fie, fie! He might have heard you."

"I don't care a straw. He's not a pal of mine, and never could be; so what need it matter to me?"

"He's not very far wrong either, though," said the young fellow, with a half embarrassed laugh, "for he can't be seen from the street where he is, but we all can; and what on earth will all the people we know think of us, for there is your sister throwing down bits of plaster on the passers-by?"

Certainly Miss Esther Smeeth had calmly seated herself on the parapet, and was, from this airy vantage-post, bombarding any chance wayfarers with bits of Roman cement picked off by her own fair fingers; while keeping up a brisk second fire of raillery against Jack Dimity, and as usual swinging her legs. Suddenly Birdie was seen to be very risibly affected, as she looked at the rival who had temporarily succeeded in alluring Jack's attentions from herself.

She whispered to Pussy, who seemed also highly tickled; then both "passed it on" to Mr. Jones; who, however, though he nodded his heavy head and smiled, hardly seemed to consider the joke equally excellent. Next, Fuzzy heard and imparted it to Major Hodge, who sat nearest her in the row, and Daisy who was close by, could not avoid (literally) eavesdropping. The joke was "Look at Miss Smeeth's stockings!"

Just at the heels, peeping above her low, out-door shoes, was a large hole in each.

"Tidy, isn't it?" said Fuzzy, laughing affectedly; for she rather feared often that her major had thoughts of deserting to the enemy, and was not sorry that her dear friend should thus expose herself to unkind criticism.

"I hope you have marked, learnt, and mean to inwardly digest that."

"Haw, haw! What, digest the stockings? No, thank you; I'm afraid they would be rather too much for me," replied the big major, with a great laugh.

Then wishing to tease Fuzzy, whose jealousy he knew, but being a good-humoured man in small matters, he added:

"Poor little girl! They are rather badly off, you know; so I think it's rather a shame to laugh at her."

"Well, really, darning-cotton is cheap, and I suppose she has the use of her fingers," said Fuzzy, smartly; for the Cox girls dressed better than most of the Marstown young

ladies, to do them justice, and spent all their spare time in making up new clothes, while their mother used superhuman efforts to keep their old ones neat and tidy.

At this moment the young lady with the faulty stockings became aware of the general gaze being directed upon herself, and asked:

"Mr. Dimity, what is the matter? Do look at my feet, and tell me if there is anything wrong with them."

Jack stooped down, and did as requested.

"There's nothing wrong with your feet," he said, in his bluff way, "but there is with your stockings."

"Jumping Jehoshaphat!" muttered the young lady, as she inspected the damage.

She was supposed to have the smallest feet in Marstown, and, though very badly off, did her best to keep them well booted; so now, though she sat up defiantly and kicked her feet again, there was a sparkle of tears in her eyes.

"Laugh away, all of you! I don't want to stop you," she said, addressing them all. "Only this much let me tell you, there was not a hole in these when I started. But we had a long walk here, and these are the only pair of black silk stockings I ever owned in the world. So they are rather old, I will say; but I can't afford to buy any others till my ship comes in."

"Bravo! Don't be ashamed of yourself, Miss Esther," applauded Smiler Lee.

"Only draws attention to very pretty ankles," said Jack, in a tone of gruff consolation.

Captain Gascoigne added, speaking across several others:

"No one could have taken our teasing more good-humouredly, at all events, Miss Smeeth."

"Our" teasing! He had certainly not helped in the laugh against her. Praise from Gascoigne was so rare, and he was usually so quiet, that Miss Smeeth thanked him with a more vivid pleasure than her other defenders had given her, although so lately declaring he was "no pal of hers."

"That man always says a kind word whenever he can—that I must say for him; but the rest are so spiteful," vehemently asseverated the other Smeeth sister, who had called Gascoigne a "muff," addressing Daisy in an undertone. "Oh, I was watching you, Miss Dimity, and you didn't laugh; so I don't mind saying to you what I feel about it.

And Birdie Cox is always like that, though she pretends to be such a friend of ours. But I'm sure you know how new shoes nip at the heel."

Daisy did know—especially cheap ones, with a hard edge, as she inwardly thought. She was honestly sympathising, and Miss Smeeth seemed somewhat comforted.

Major Hodge again infused good-humour into the now jarring elements by remarking:

"I knew a lady—an awfully pretty woman, too—who was going out to a ball one night and found she had a hole, too, in her black-silk stockings; so what d'ye all think she did? Give it up? Why, inked it with the feather end of a quill pen. Ha—ha! capital plan."

Just at this moment some one announced that more passers-by were seen coming up the road. The road, which rejoiced in the name of Kyber Pass, was lined with genteel villas, and not much frequented.

"Let us all lay in ammunition to bombard the enemy," cried Mr. Lee gaily, crouching behind the parapet and preparing tiny cement pellets.

Most of the party eagerly followed suit; for Mrs. Cox having slipped away—to do some of the daintier cooking, unsuspected, in the kitchen regions—there was no check upon them, and the fun grew fast and furious.

At first the bullets were so small that they either missed their mark, or, if felt, the persons in the street thought it was some mistake on their own parts; since, on looking up, they could see no one—all heads being well hidden.

But soon this seemed tame, and bits of bread-and-butter, biscuits, and lumps of sugar were used regardless of consequences.

Daisy, who took no part in this, began to grow extremely uncomfortable.

She had not felt exactly happy on the roof from the first, but now she felt decidedly unhappy, and somewhat ashamed of her friends' proceedings.

"Won't your sister join us? What a quiet little mouse she is!" said some of the other girls to Jack Dimity, as Daisy resisted demurely all their appeals to do as they did.

"Come along, Daisy; won't you?" called out the young man thus urged; and then, seeing disinclination in his sister's rosy face, he edged himself along the slates to add, in an undertone: "What's up—what's the matter?"

"Oh, Jack dear, I'd rather not; really. It doesn't seem to me very—very nice." (That adjective of universal feminine application presenting itself helpfully, as being neither too strong nor too weak.)

"Nice!" repeated Jack, in a tone of scorn that withered the poor little word. "Oh well, if you like to stick by yourself, I've nothing to say against it. Only it looks rather as if you were setting yourself up as the only person among us that knows how to behave properly."

And away he crawled again, before he could get any answer.

The truth was, he was annoyed at his sister's scruples, when he had been vastly enjoying himself; and yet he would not say she was wrong.

A forlorn, small, so-called Pharisee, gazed rather miserably after him—being grieved at the idea of accusing anyone—when a friendly-sounding voice said from the trap-door, the near neighbourhood of which she and Jack had quite forgotten:

"Do you know much about heraldry, Miss Dimity?"

"Heraldry? No, not much—a little. Grandpapa used to be rather fond of studying it, though; and I used to help him by looking out bits about it in the winter evenings," said Daisy, starting, and rather blushing at acknowledging the hobby of the grand-paternal haberdasher, to which the Dimitys owed their crest and coat-of-arms, and, indeed, some very vague ancestors, whom the old gentleman believed in with all the pride of a discoverer. "Why do you ask me?"

"Because you may remember how a cat or a greyhound is represented sitting *sejant*, with their forepaws put straight out before them. Look, now, at all the rest of our party—at Miss Smeeth especially! Is she not sitting *sejant?*"

Captain Gascoigne, as he said so, gave a quiet laugh of intense enjoyment that quite surprised Daisy. Looking at him, she also noticed that he raised his nose—a large and solid feature this was in his face, too—as if the same nose took a most especial share in all enjoyment going on. It was a trick of habit he had.

"I declare you are right. It is perfectly true!" she exclaimed, turning to gaze at the rest of the party.

They were all sitting crouched in a row on the slates, with their feet stuck out before them, just as if they were going to play "hunt the slipper."

"You are not among the worshippers of Asmodeus, I think?" went on Captain Gascoigne.

"Asmodeus? I am afraid I don't know. Was he in 'Mangnall's Questions'?" asked little Miss Dimity, rather confused.

"That I really cannot inform you; but perhaps he might be found in 'Pinnock's Catechism, or the Child's Guide to Useful Knowledge.' He was the god of roofs."

"O-h! And you think I am unsociable, as Jack does, because I don't much like being up here; but—but really, Captain Gascoigne, it makes me feel a little giddy."

"You were never so high in your life before. Exactly so, Miss Dimity; that is my feeling too; but don't you see the rest are giddy too, and like it?"

The speaker's tone was quizzically kindly; as if he did not believe in Daisy's excuse in the least, but rather approved of it.

A perfect jubilee!—suppressed, delighted calls and giggles from the rest, now attracted their attention. All the sharpshooters were peering out, cautiously, at some fresh victims coming up the street below.

"Who are they, Miss Dimity, can you tell me?" asked Gascoigne, who could neither see nor be seen in his prudent lair.

"They are two old ladies dressed in black; the Misses Silverthorne, I hear them say."

"Come along, Miss Dimity—oh, do come! And, Captain Gascoigne, you will never have such an opportunity in your life again. These two are the most horrible old cats!" bawled Easy Smeeth, in a loud whisper.

"They are two very well-bred and good old ladies, I have always thought," said Gascoigne, very slowly and quietly to Daisy, quite reddening. "I think Miss Smeeth does not know them herself, and is rather severe upon them. If you will excuse me, Miss Dimity, I will slip downstairs, not to seem to have a share in what might possibly annoy old friends of mine."

"Then please let me go down with you, for I don't like it at all either," whispered Daisy, in a hurry. And silently agreeing, with a pleased look, Gascoigne was preparing to help her quickly to escape, when—unknown to himself, the catastrophe he had dreaded occurred.

He rose out of the trap, to allow her to descend first;

and his tall figure was outlined on the roof. At that moment, without his seeing it, the two old ladies looked up and recognised him. Two seconds more, and he was in safety hurrying down the stairs with Daisy; but not before both had beheld a small shower of cake, sugar, and soot-lumps flung down upon the pedestrians.

"The Misses Silverthorne could not have seen me, could they?" asked Gascoigne, as they gained the drawing-room, in a tone of severity that made Daisy positively start, as, coming after his usual quiet drawl, it took one aback.

She was silent, fearing the old ladies could.

He, however, reassured himself, apparently being superior to her opinion, and added blandly, after thoughtfully pulling his moustache:

"Oh, no, they could not. I am very glad of it."

"Are they great friends of yours?" Daisy ventured to ask.

"Well, hardly great friends, Miss Dimity; for you must consider they are really old ladies, and, indeed, I have only seen them a few times now, though they knew me as a child. But I know something of their relations. They are of a good old county family, and were obliged by bad circumstances to leave a charming home they had to come to Marstown, where they have very few friends; so I rather feel for them. They live next door, you know."

"Indeed! in that tiny house? Then, of course, Mrs. Cox knows them; and I think I should like to see them very much from what you say, poor ladies!"

Captain Gascoigne gazed at the carpet, so that Miss Dimity, looking innocently full at his face, hardly caught a twinkle in his eye.

"N-o; I don't think Mrs. Cox does know them, nor do the Misses Smeeth either. The fact is, these old ladies don't much care for society, at which some people here seem rather offended."

"Oh!" replied Miss Dimity, in an astonished undertone, wondering all the more at the late scene.

But Gascoigne stopped her from longer consideration.

Being a methodical man, he was aware this was an excellent chance of doing his duty in making himself agreeable to his friend's sister; so, having seated himself comfortably, he began to do so—at least, according to his own idea thereof—like the best of us.

By-and-by, he found himself quite *au fait* as to the whole history of why and how Miss Dimity had found herself staying at the Coxes. Truly without any intention of "drawing" her, a few judicious questions soon brought out all that was brimming over in such an unsophisticated mind. Daisy quite forgot her fear of strange gentlemen, and of this one in particular; for he, instead of being grave, now looked quite smiling; and was most friendly, though so quiet.

"And so this is your very first introduction into gaieties and society," he said at last, sleepily, with quite a benignant smile. "Well, what is the next entertainment to be, that you are going to?"

"Oh, we are to hear the band play to-morrow evening in the Gardens, and then have late tea with the Smeeths. The Misses Cox told me it was so pleasant!" cried Daisy, delightedly. "Are you not coming, too, to hear the band? They told me everyone would be there."

The tall man beside her silently shook his head. Till then he had sat bent forward, in a sort of attentive manner, as if politeness kept him from leaning back in a lady's presence. Now he positively played with the fringe of an antimacassar. (Who will invent a less odious, but universal name for that useful article?)

"You see, I have heard so many bands that they are no longer the utter rarity to me that they are to a young lady fresh from the country and her schoolroom like yourself."

"The truth is, you are *blasé*, I suppose—and sick of society, like the people one reads of in novels; but I have always thought that is a very bad frame of mind, and it must be good for everyone to mix with their neighbours," retorted Miss Dimity, positively assuming a reproving air as of a coquettish, newly-hatched chicken taking on itself to lecture a farmyard-weary game-fowl, whose spurs were long since won. But then she shyly added: "I am so sorry if you are not really coming; for really strangers frighten me."

Gascoigne positively laughed at this, but said, after a while:

"Well, yes; I think I must go this time; if only after that dreadful reproach of yours, of being *blasé*." Then looking quite warmly at the fresh face and dewy, forget-me-not eyes opposite him, he added: "I cannot help wondering what you will think of a garrison town and of garrison

society! It must be so utterly different from the green fields, and quiet home surroundings, you have been brought up in. What do you do here? How do you like it?"

Daisy's tongue was quite unloosed by his cordial manner, and she described all her impressions; and how they had spent the morning in "chatting—in doing nothing but chat——"

"What about?"

"Oh, a hundred things" (with shame-faced evasion).

"Did not the Misses Cox talk about any of the officers in the garrison?" (A sly question, so mildly and insinuatingly put in an honest way by Captain Gascoigne, that his little interlocutor walked unsuspectingly into the trap.)

Well—Daisy owned they did; but indeed the names quite confused her brain, and, having met no officers, she did not care to talk about them very much.

"But did you all do nothing but talk—from breakfast to lunch? Surely a young lady who teaches her young brothers generally all morning, as you tell me you do, must have found talking about gentlemen in red coats all morning rather a waste of time, Miss Dimity"—unfairly making a large inference as to the morning's talk from her guileless admission, and pursuing it: "Did you not do any crochet, or hemming, or tatting?"

"Well, really, it did seem a whole morning lost; only I should not like the Misses Cox to know I thought so, they are all so very kind. For you see, Captain Gascoigne, besides teaching the boys at home, I always like two hours to keep up my own studies. Polly and I both agreed it would not be right to forget everything we had learnt as soon as the governess had left us. But as to work—crochet and tatting are old-fashioned. You should look at my lovely new floss-silk embroidery. Please do." And, with pardonable pride, this industrious young Penelope seized her workbox to display the treasure of needlework. This Captain Gascoigne, being very short-sighted, bent down to examine closely with deep interest.

Down rolled a gold thimble, which Daisy stooped to hunt for. After three seconds of search she raised herself successful and glowing.

"Well, Captain Gascoigne? Please say you approve of my work."

Then she stood rooted to the ground with dismay, and

blushing like the veriest field-poppy; scarlet, and yet more scarlet; as her brother's friend of friends—the grave, tall man, whose kindliness had almost banished the awe his dignified reserve had caused in her simple soul—said, in a gravely sarcastic tone:

"Oh, yes. And, of course, as an officer in Her Majesty's service, I ought equally to approve of your morning's studies, Miss Dimity," showing, hidden under her pretty embroidery, the ragged cover and dog's-eared pages of the "Army List," opening in such a tell-tale fashion of its own accord. Alas! she had quite forgotten that Birdie Cox had thrust it in there.

It was a little dull that evening after tea; or else Daisy was dispirited. The doctor, however, was cheery—always cheery—he loudly declared, rubbing his hands, and challenging Daisy to play backgammon.

She was surprised to see, when she accepted, that the rest looked upon her with eyes of evident pity. This was explained later by her winning the first three games; after which the doctor's geniality, that had been vanishing since his first loss, utterly melted into air. Daisy at last, perceiving what was wrong, allowed him to win; congratulating herself on her *finesse*. But alas! she had rejoiced too soon, for her host then proposed more and still more games, till she was quite weary and he was triumphant.

CHAPTER VIII.

Let never maiden think, however fair,
She is not fairer in new clothes than old.

Some people, when secretly ashamed of themselves, sulk. Others, while trying to hide their behaviour, are suspiciously humble (as you may also remark in a poor dog of tender conscience), and are most anxious to do private penance by little acts of unusual kindness to other people.

Daisy belonged to the latter class of secret sinners.

On the morning after she had fallen so desperately in Captain Gascoigne's and her own good opinion, she rose with her feelings quite sensibly depressed, and her rosy face sobered in expression. At breakfast (to which the three young ladies came ten minutes later than the morning before) Mrs. Cox told her daughters that a message had

just come from the sempstress whom they frequently employed, that her mother was dying, so she could not come to sew for them.

There was general consternation.

"Bother her mother! My ball-dress is in rags at the tail. I know it was all that stupid Major Hodge's spurs at the last dance; and I never could sew for myself; so there is no use trying," wailed Birdie, throwing a vindictive glance at her eldest sister, who reasonably replied:

"Well, you don't suppose I can prevent him wearing spurs, do you? My own dress wants about two dozen yards of ruching to hide the stains of the green pea-soup that Captain O'Donoghue spilt over my shoulders that night after the concert, when he was bear-fighting with little Lee. I declare they behave as badly sometimes with us, as if they were in their mess-room. Well, I suppose I must find time to help you, Baby—though why you can't stitch as Pussy and I have always had to do, beats me."

"And I will help you too, my child," put in Mrs. Cox, though with a secret sigh; thinking of the various dishes for the guest she dared not trust to the cook, and the little schoolboys' socks, and heaven knows what more!

Pussy remained discreetly silent, but——

"Let me sew for you," exclaimed little Miss Dimity's fresh voice. "Yes, indeed I will. You must let me make up your dress, every bit."

And she kept her word—even more fully than she had anticipated.

For, Birdie's dress proving by daylight so ragged and dirty when exposed to view that poor Mrs. Cox blushed on seeing it laid out, the latter hurried into the town to buy yards of tarlatane to veil its deficiencies.

"You darling! You will make it up for me exactly like the Princess of Wales's dress described in *The Queen*, won't you?" exclaimed Birdie ecstatically, curling herself down on the hearth-rug, and looking up at Daisy, who was energetically handling big scissors, and threading needles and making a scientific apparent litter.

"Listen to it here: 'A jupe of the richest creamy satin, bouillonné, veiled with tulle illusion, tunic cut *en inimitable, relevé* with bouquets of choicest stove-housium orchidaceæ, mixed with sprays of diamonds——'"

"Exactly! Oh, you can easily make that!" sarcastically

interposed Fuzzy, from where she bent over the sewing-machine, speaking with her mouth full of pins.

"Never mind the diamonds, and, of course, I can't afford the flowers," valiantly declared the youngest Miss Cox. "But my jupe is cream-satine, anyhow; and it can be veiled with tarlatane instead of tulle illusion, just as well; can't it, my own sweetest helper?" affectionately addressing her guest.

Daisy, bending over the gown in question, could not help thinking that cotton-satine is a very different stuff from richest real satin; also that the jupe or skirt in question had plainly once been snow-white, but now was merely yellowish from age—Isabel-hue, as the French term it—while tarlatane at eightpence a yard (double width) is useful and cleanly, but could hardly look quite as diaphanous as the royal robe.

There was very little talking this morning, except on the all-absorbing subject of dress; the stitchers being too busy. Birdie, indeed, sitting lazily on the hearth-rug, had begun some banter against her elder sisters; but was absolutely told, to her secret indignation, that, if she could not sew, or be otherwise useful, she could at least keep from disturbing them. And, to carry out the first hint, Daisy, being a practical-minded young person, to the lazy young lady's astonishment, gave her several simple jobs· basting-threads to pull out; tucks to turn down.

Birdie dared not refuse their guest, but sat with her yellow head crossly down-bent, and her sharp little nose growing red at the tip with vexation.

Daisy silently remarked this as her needle flew shining down long seams, and it set her thinking of another nose—of a very different, ugly nose, but one that held itself up in an honest, lordly way above all things mean. It was a most honest nose in its expression, no doubt, but sometimes assumed too much the character of a self-righteous judge in Miss Dimity's opinion; and her cheeks grew red all over at the memory of yesterday's misadventure.

The worst was, there had been no explanation after the awful "find."

Dumbfounded, Daisy had stood under Gascoigne's gaze; and before she could speak in exculpation, long, indeed, before her shame-stricken small wits were gathered together, the rest of the party had entered, seeming to flood the room with talk.

"Don't you like old Gascoigne?" Jack had admiringly muttered to his sister; and the latter at last raising her eyes had seen a tall figure just disappearing from the room, who had not thought it necessary to say good-bye to all the guests after taking his leave of Mrs. Cox.

Daisy had faintly murmured back an "Oh, yes," not knowing what to say; feeling much disposed in her annoyance to answer "No"—and to detest that vanishing reddish-brown, square head.

Just now, with that curious sympathy between thoughts that no one has yet explained, Daisy was startled on being suddenly asked by Pussy:

"Oh! do tell us, by-the-way, how you liked Captain Gascoigne yesterday. You quite ran off with him from us all, didn't she? I mean, dear, you made a decided impression."

"Then it was more than I cared to do," quoth little Miss Dimity decidedly, the tinge of jealousy in the speaker's tone not having been lost upon her.

There was such a ring of honesty in Daisy's words that no one could ever doubt their utter sincerity.

"What—did you really not like him, then? Why don't you like him? What is it you don't like about him?"

This avalanche of questions was rained in astonishment down on Daisy's head.

"I am not quite sure yet; but I think I dis—like him," very slowly. "And I can't tell you all why." (That would have been to reveal the work-box episode.) Then, with a happy inspiration, "He has such a terribly ugly nose."

They all laughed at her. Fancy minding a man's nose.

But yet, in a somewhat suspicious manner, Pussy and Birdie agreed with their little guest. It was an enormous nose. It was square at the end—a perfect handle to the poor man's face.

Only Fuzzy softly whistled at all this, till nearly choking herself with half swallowing a pin. Then suddenly, while work was going on in full swing, and the sewing-machine buzzing like a dozen hives of bees, it was stopped with a jerk, and bang went Fuzzy's cuffs on the floor.

"I never can work properly with cuffs on; in fact, they always make me feel miserable," she explained to Daisy.

"Well, if one is doing any hard or dirty work, I take off mine too," honestly replied the other.

After a few more seconds, however, Fuzzy gave an impatient pull at her throat, and twitch—away came her collar, which was only held in its place by a single humpbacked pin. It followed its cousins, the cuffs, to degradation on the floor.

"I declare one is in comfort now," said Fuzzy; neck and wrists appearing strangely out of her coarse serge dress, unrelieved by any white. "If it wasn't that they all agree it is my line to shoot my cuffs, and sport a round collar like a man, I'd never wear any."

"Oh, but Fuzzy, you must! We can't all go in for the same sort of thing, you know—three in a family, all eating up each other's chances," interposed Birdie, turning eagerly to Daisy. "Don't you agree? It was my idea. I settled when I came out that we must try to be different, so Fuzzy has to go in for talking sport to the men—hunting and betting, you know, and a little slang," with a small deprecatory laugh. "But Pussy is the quietest of us all, and reads most; so she has to be the blue-stocking of the family. I wanted her to take to parish work and curates, for she is just made for it."

"But I won't, so there's an end of it! I'll either marry a soldier and live in barracks, or not at all. It's too much for you to be the tyrant of us all in everything, Baby. You've taken good care to take the easiest line of us all, so that should satisfy you," interposed Pussy, hardly raising her usual soft tones, but with a quiet venom that showed she could be dangerous when angered. She went on:

"If you had to read, whether you liked it or not, to keep up your reputation, see what you would say! The other day, there was Captain Gascoigne asked me if I had not read Mr. Gladstone's famous speech, eight columns long, and was so surprised when I said that I had not, because he said my sister had told him I was so fond of politics. So I read it all up the next day—ugh! two hours of it. But it was a week before we met him again, and when I tried, and tried hard, to begin talking about this great speech and the Irish Question, he told me calmly at last that it was a thing of the past already, and that nobody spoke of anything now but the new Eastern complication. Complication, indeed! I loathe the very sight of the leading articles."

"And I hate horses, and abominate betting," burst in Fuzzy—pausing to join Pussy in the tempting opportunity

of venting their real feelings for once. "I never can quite understand all about the odds; Miss Dimity, and there! if I didn't go and bet at the last regimental races with a horrible man in the commissariat who flirts with Essie Smeeth, and before I knew he had won a pair of gloves from me. I could have cried!—but I had to pay up, because Essie laughed at me so about it. And, as to talking about horses after my reading up in that all about curbs and spavins, and I don't know what all—little Smiler Lee chaffed me so one day when he took me a ride; for I was in such a fright, I kept saying my prayers all the time."

With a laughing grimace at the recollection—for Fuzzy's sorrows over her lost *rôle* were by no means so deep as Miss Pussy's at being blue—she pointed out a large book to Daisy that lay somewhat hidden from sight.

"Why, it is 'On the Horse,' the very same that papa keeps in his growlery at home, at Elm Hall!" exclaimed Daisy, opening her eyes. "You don't say you read up that? I do pity you."

Fuzzy nodded, with a resigned sort of grin; and sent the sewing-machine flying harder than ever. But Birdie laughed maliciously, and rolled full length on the hearth-rug, delighted to think that the line of life she had kept to herself was that of the *ingénue* of the family, the spoilt Baby, who could not be expected to be either useful or deeply read.

None of the girls felt in the least shy, it seemed, of pouring all these confidences into the ears of their guest. They were not reticent by nature; and no new-comer could have been less alarming than this one, who simply opened her blue eyes wider and wider in innocent astonishment, but no more thought of looking severe than would a pigeon.

Suddenly Fuzzy, whose post near the bay-window commanded a view down the street's full length, rose rather hastily and said:

"I quite forgot, I want to do some shopping very much before lunch. Which of you will come with me? If we hurry, we can be just in time."

The other sisters, for some reason or other, both at once looked out down the street, and then smiled significantly.

"Really, Fuzzy, I cannot leave my own dress to go running into the town at all hours with you," purred Pussy. "Such a time of day to take too. Besides, it's really of no use."

"Well, then, you can come, Birdie; you're doing nothing, I am sure," said the elder sister, sharply.

"Why on earth can you not go alone, as I do, if I want to meet anyone? You are old enough, goodness knows! Go out this morning? No, indeed; I am too lazy."

"Indeed, so you are!" bitterly murmured Fuzzy, who had a good heart, and, from Birdie's infancy, had been fond of and spoilt the younger sister, who now tyrannised over them all. She was, besides, with all her affectation of loudness, the most weak of the trio. "I hate going alone, and you know it. It looks so like running after——"

She stopped abruptly as Daisy, who had sprung up from her work, joined them.

"Let me go. I love shopping. I shan't keep you one moment while I put on my things." And away she flew.

(N.B. It is only strong-minded ladies who do not love shopping; or will own they require more than one second to put on their things!)

CHAPTER IX.

I promised to buy her a bunch of blue riband
To tie up her bonny brown hair.

As the two girls emerged equipped, Daisy noticed that her companion's eyes were eagerly following a man's figure, which was just disappearing round the street-corner.

"We were too slow in dressing!" ungratefully escaped from Fuzzy, with a sigh, and she began walking very fast. Daisy did not know the cause of the hurry, but nevertheless hastened beside her at a great pace.

"What are you going to buy?" she presently asked, rather short of breath.

Miss Cox looked at her.

"Oh! well, I am not sure what first;—there are several things."

They had gained the street-corner, and again Fuzzy gazed eagerly ahead.

It was a short, deserted alley; and again Daisy saw the same big figure, walking as far before them as before.

As if she had seen her goal, Miss Cox began hastening faster than ever, so they dived into a network of lanes, and they scurried over crossings, knocked against blind beggars, aud were nearly run over by drays, cabs, and hand-carts—till Daisy, who was plump and short of person, perfectly

panted, although in good condition; and began to feel as if this were, somehow, a positive race.

"Do you much mind going quick? I like it so much better than sauntering," asked Fuzzy, with a gasp in her own breath. "Isn't it—dreadful—how much faster men can go than we—although they don't—look—as if they hurried?"

She was looking at a gentleman ahead, who was going with easy strides, lurching a little in his walk, and twirling a cané. He looked marvellously like the very figure they had first seen when they came out; and, if so, had humiliatingly kept his advantage in point of distance.

And now they had got into the High Street, full of shops and passengers, among which latter groups the person in front of them was frequently lost to view. But Daisy could not help perceiving that her companion's whole gaze and aim seemed directed on preventing this event occurring, and that they dodged to right or left, regardless of the rule of the road, and of irate old ladies, simply as was dictated by the movements of the individual in front.

Daisy now began to feel certain her new friend was leading her on a chase, and could hardly restrain her girlish laughter. Being fond also of going out hunting with the squire, she felt a horrible longing to cry "Forrard—forrard!" or "Whoo-whoop!"

She was most thankful now she had made no remonstrances as to the pace they were going at.

Now another individual met the unconscious victim—seemed to have been waiting for him, from the gestures and slaps on the shoulder they interchanged—and they turned together into a large warehouse, heartily laughing.

The pursuit slackened.

Daisy, with thanksgiving, subsided from a breathless trot into an exhausted walk; and Fuzzy, composing her features, and trying to assume an air of innocent unconcern, observed:

"Thank goodness! here is the shop we are going to at last."

They followed into the shop after their prey, Daisy feeling exactly as if they were a couple of sleuth-hounds; and, after a few seconds of decent dallying before a stand of elegant gutta-percha ornaments, turned a counter, and came full upon—Major Hodge!

Mutual astonishment on meeting was expressed by him and Miss Fuzzy, whilst Daisy, standing demurely behind,

for the first time recognised in him the object of their hunt. She was not sure whether to be ashamed or amused; especially as the major broadly complimented Fuzzy on her fine complexion, crimsoned by the chase, asking, with a sly look:

"What have you been doing in the town? I never go out without seeing something of you in the afternoons; but I did not expect to be so lucky at this hour."

"We—we have been doing a little shopping. Goodness! why is Mr. Jones hiding behind the pillar there?"

Pussy's black-eyed swain was indeed trying to secrete himself, as if bashful; but now, on hearing his name, came forward, with an awkward rumbling laugh, from an adjacent counter.

"I have been helping Major Hodge to buy some articles of—of—dress," he explained.

"Not at all—don't you believe him, Miss Cox. *I* have been helping Mr. Jones to buy some little articles of—of—clothing," mimicked the major, with a great haw-haw.

An amicable skirmish of meaning looks and inuendoes, as over some excellent private joke, followed.

But Daisy did not hear more, having hurriedly turned away, and begun buying some ribbon that she did not in the least want. Peering slyly round, she could see that the discreet Mr. Jones had also retired to a little distance, leaving the tender couple together.

The major's big burly figure looked elephantine beside Fuzzy—who was rather slight and tight of outline—and he leered (no other word expresses the feeling his look conveyed to Daisy) down upon Miss Cox's really pretty fair-haired head, and her cheeks glowing with her late exertions, as if to say: "Come, you *are* rather a nice little creature to be so fond of me. I must give you an extra dance some time for this."

"What coloured ribbon, miss?" asked the stalwart shopman, whose sinews looked as if they might have been more fitly employed as a defender of his country than in handling a tape measure.

"What colour? Any—I mean, blue," stammered Daisy; confused by trying hastily to think whether she could combine any future usefulness with the present expediency of her purchase. "What length do I want? A yard or two—it doesn't much matter—whatever you have there. Three

and a quarter? Oh well, that will do quite as well; yes, yes, give it to me, please."

"You seem delightfully easy to be pleased, Miss Dimity," said Mr. Jones, close behind, making her start. "Always heard before that ladies got everything down to look at that was in a shop, and then went off without buying anything."

At this juncture Major Hodge and Fuzzy came up, the former inquiring very particularly of the latter:

"But what do *you* want, Miss Cox? You came in for some shopping; don't let us detain you. Or would my advice be of any assistance? Ha, ha!"

"I—oh, I don't want anything here, thank you. I am only waiting till Miss Dimity has finished."

"Miss Dimity's shopping does not seem very important. She did not seem to know what she wanted," Mr. Jones interposed; and he was describing Daisy's hesitation over her ribbon for the amusement of Major Hodge, and the certain discomfiture of poor Miss Cox, when the little lady drew herself up with dignity.

"You are quite mistaken, Mr. Jones. It is only that I am not very well accustomed to buying things for myself; that is all."

"Of course, dear, you should have asked my advice; why didn't I think of it?" cried Fuzzy, warmly and volubly, taking her arm, and saying to the two men: "She always makes me think of a little creature that everyone ought to pet and take care of. Come, I must look after you now. You have got what you want——?"

So they went out of the shop, Fuzzy still pressing Daisy's arm, and exclaiming as they got out of earshot, with real affection:

"You are a darling—I positively declare you are a darling. But, do tell me, what was Mr. Jones buying; did you see? He looked so foolish, and Major Hodge looked so caught; I was dying to know."

"I think it was—stockings," said Daisy.

"Stockings! Was that all? I was so afraid that they did not want us; it made me quite nervous, I declare! If I had known that, we might have stayed longer."

Daisy felt devoutly glad, then, that she had not known it; being inwardly convinced of the truth of Miss Cox's first supposition, that they had not been wanted by the gentlemen.

It was a serious reflection, that Mr. Jones now possibly suspected her also of having had ulterior designs in entering the shop. It was almost as bad (yet, no! not nearly) as the terrible misadventure with Captain Gascoigne. These two events, in two successive days, quite made stains on the sheen and glamour with which little Miss Dimity's imagination had glorified her first visit. She even morbidly thought for five and a half seconds—

> The world is wide; these things are small:
> They may be little, but they are all.

But then Fuzzy's evident, intense gratitude, the reflection that she might have been of more possible use than she quite knew to her eldest young hostess, and her own healthy spirits and conscience helped to restore Daisy's equanimity.

It may be remarked further that Miss Cox subsequently made two dives into shops, perhaps for form's sake, leaving Daisy on the pavement. But each time she returned observing they had not got what she wanted there; and so went home empty-handed.

CHAPTER X.

> O wha will shoe my fair foot,
> And wha will glove my han'?
> And wha will lace my middle jimp
> Wi' a new-made London ban'?

This was the evening on which they were all to go to the public gardens to hear one of the military bands: the delightful prospect Daisy had so glowingly spoken of to Captain Gascoigne.

She dressed herself in a cool cream costume that seemed meant for such a warm June evening; and, putting on Polly's hat (the hat of hats lent her to grace this first great visit!) won much applause from everyone when she appeared in the drawing-room. Especially Mrs. Cox gently called her over to pat and admiringly examine her dress (inwardly resolving to make one for Birdie, after that identical pattern, so soon as their guest had left Marstown).

"She is always so charmingly dressed; as indeed she is charming in all ways," said the lady to Jack Dimity, who had just come to escort them to the gardens.

To which that young man, well pleased, answered in

excellent modern English, after an approving inspection of his sister:

"Well, it is rather fetching. Daisy, you look a howling swell to-day. But I have got rather bad news for you all! Our ball is put off."

"Put off!" There was a general lengthening of faces, so that the good old expression, their jaws had fallen, would have been literally true.

It appeared that an aged colonel had just died, who had been so intimately connected with "the Strappers" that it seemed in bad taste to dance on the night of his funeral, so the ball would be given a week later instead.

"A week later!"

No one felt sadder than Daisy, who was trying hard not to look as if she minded; since she had been only invited to spend a week; and now it was Thursday, and Jack's regiment's ball, that had been fixed for next Tuesday, would only take place on Tuesday week.

"Never mind, my dear, you must stay on with us a little longer, that is all," said Mrs. Cox, kindly, after a quick glance of inquiry at her daughters, who all three warmly seconded the proposal; declaring that the prospect of keeping their guest longer quite atoned for the temporary disappointment.

"It is the best luck that could happen—will bring him here ever so much oftener," whispered Fuzzy, commending her mother and glancing at young Dimity.

"Yes; I know. But then men always run after new girls for a time, and Captain Gascoigne yesterday seemed rather——" murmured the cautious mother, hesitating whether, after all, she had done right.

"Fudge! That woman-hater!" and away marched Miss Cox.

But Pussy paused, to warn her mother with feline caution, her interests being at stake.

"Perhaps you are right, mamma; but you must keep your eye on him. Now mind you do, and don't be forgetting yourself and gossiping with the other old women; and don't let her out of your sight."

Mrs. Cox, smothering a sigh, dutifully prepared to obey, and they went forth in the sunny evening to the gardens.

Crowds of townspeople were streaming out to enjoy themselves after the day's labours; soldiers' red coats

brightened the dull streets, going and coming by twos and threes—generally either going to the public-houses or coming out of them. That part of the gardens, however, to which our party was bound was railed off, and for a small admission price a large result of privacy was obtained. Daisy did not esteem this privilege properly; a crowd was a rarity to her, and a mob an amusing mass of fellow-beings.

The band was in full swing when they arrived; and groups of acquaintances of the Coxes were promenading the gravelled walks that surrounded a grass tennis-ground.

Girls by twos, by threes, even by fours of a family were warmly greeted by the Coxes, and all gushingly introduced to Miss Dimity as their dearest friends. It seemed to Daisy she had never seen so many girls in her life before; and all wore dresses buttoned up the back and skimped in material below. She found herself calculating in absence of mind how little it might take to make their frocks, when Jack roused her by saying:

"Hallo!"

Jack had shown at first an evident determination not to forsake his sister; and Birdie accordingly evinced equal ardour for her companionship. So these three had strolled together; while Mrs. Cox, being very tired, sat down on a bench at Jack's bluff instance, and to Birdie's great annoyance, who worshipped the flirtatious maxim, "Three is no company."

Fuzzy and Pussy, meeting Major Hodge and Mr. Jones, became lost to history thenceforth.

"Hallo!" repeated Jack. "Why, here is Captain Gascoigne. I never expected to see you at the band," as his friend in question lounged up very, very quietly, and greeted the young ladies.

"Well, it was your sister who induced me to come, do you know, by the account she kindly gave me yesterday of the charms of the locality and the merits of the entertainment," observed Gascoigne, with as quiet a smile.

"You!" muttered Jack, vastly pleased, aside to his sister. "Do you know, that is a great compliment to you, Daisy?"

To her? Daisy could discern no compliment at all in that quiet, sarcastic voice, as she called it to herself. She was inwardly quite furious, and held up her head high. As if she wanted this grave, strict Pharisee gentleman; as if

he thought her capable of angling for his company! After yesterday's scene, too!

Precisely—that had made him think less of her. After which—thinking less of her—his coming to-day partook of the nature of an insult. And how could she like even Jack's friend who could thus curtly insult her?—which was an admirable syllogism but for its basis.

A great, valiant resolution in Miss Dimity's throat nearly choked her.

Jack and Birdie Cox had somehow gone on a little in front, under the mistaken idea that Daisy would be charmed with her present companionship. All the past night, and all the bygone morning, she had been telling herself with retrospective shame, then stern resolve—that she must make Captain Gascoigne an EXPLANATION.

Now or never!

They took three paces in silence, then she began, in a meek, small voice:

"Captain Gascoigne—I thought" (long break of agony—forced renewal) "I—I thought, Captain Gascoigne——"

"Yes?" interrogated Gascoigne; and then, seeing how she hesitated, and that, though he waited, no more words seemed coming, he went on in good-humoured banter, by way of encouragement, "You say you thought, Miss Dimity. It is a very good thing to do, believe me. Most young ladies, I am told, don't think, either before speaking or acting. Many men—like myself—are not capable of much thought. You thought——?"

"I was thinking——"

Horrible pause. A young person becoming a very red-tipped Daisy—a drooping-headed Daisy—uttering at last, with another gasp:

"Please, I was thinking yesterday——"

And there she stuck fast. Not another word, though her hearer waited patiently.

He looked down upon her and saw, with surprise, that she was in real distress of mind; why, he could not imagine. But he good-naturedly turned to the landscape of the tennis-ground, observing, in a musing manner:

"You bring to my memory the last song in the 'Ingoldsby Legends,' the one I liked best, though it is sad. It begins:

> As I lay a-thynkynge, a-thynkynge, a-thynkynge,
> Merrie sang the Birde as she sat upon the spraye.

Are you fond of poetry? Of course you like the moderns, like all young ladies? Now I am old-fashioned enough to like Chaucer and Milton better."

It was of no use that he so tried to give Daisy time to recover. She was only the more overpowered by this fresh evidence of Captain Gascoigne's awful unapproachableness. She could hardly quote any poetry, except a few "elegant extracts" that had been hammered into her brain in school-room days, for she had a very bad memory. But she remembered now hearing Jack say that his friend was a deeply-read man—in Master Jack's opinion.

Just now, when there was still time to speak, Mrs. Cox approached them, addressing Gascoigne by name.

She begged him to give her full particulars about the unfortunate death of his lamented whilom colonel, over whom she sweetly sighed. It made not the slightest difference to her regret that she had not known the deceased in the smallest degree; nor that Gascoigne assured her it was no very unexpected event, the veteran having been ninety-three years old. Mrs. Cox still softly persisted in sorrowing; and contrived cleverly to keep Gascoigne on her one side and Daisy on the other, while caressing the latter's arm with little, affectionate pats.

After awhile Daisy grew nervous, being unaccustomed to the patting process, and not knowing whether any response was expected; so she hailed with delight Mr. Lee's smiling face suddenly appearing beside her.

"Ah! Miss Dimity, how are you?" he cried, with a most flattering emphasis. "Very well? That's right! And where is that old ruffian, your brother? What, deserted you for anyone else! Horrible bad taste! Let me tell you what; if I had such a sister——"

This impressive remark was uttered in a mock whisper, a look supplying the end of the sentence; after which Mr. Lee gazed a moment at the sky—suppressing a laugh at his own humbug—till, Daisy laughing outright, he at once joined her, delighted with himself.

"But now may I introduce a great friend of mine? He is Captain O'Donoghue, of the 170th; the handsomest man in the British Army. May I?" he inquired, in such a tone as if asking an immense favour; and again whispering Captain O'Donoghue's attributes, as if the secret was to go no further.

Daisy felt immensely pleased, and, looking round, saw

a gentleman admiring the scenery while awaiting his introduction.

This was a decidedly well-looking man; with hair not uncaressed by curling-tongs, and an elaborately drooped moustache; both of that yellow hue which disguised almost the fact that he was turning very gray. Daisy thought with doubting admiration that he had the smallest waist, stiffest back, and broadest chest of anyone she had almost ever seen. In dress both he and Mr. Lee seemed just turned out of a bandbox, fresh from the tailor's admiring hand. Only the little Smiler was dark and dapper, neat and waxed to the last degree; whilst his friend was, as Daisy described it to herself, "fair, tall, and altogether wavy."

They made a capital foil to each other; and they knew it; being seldom far apart, and generally indeed, as they expressed it, "hunting in couples."

The "handsomest man in the British Army" seemed inclined to patronise little Miss Dimity in a most kindly manner; smiling upon her artless replies to his various queries delivered as thus, whilst continually caressing his moustache, and likewise leaning for support upon his cane with one arm akimbo — showing the elegance of his waist:

"Haw, Miss—er—Dimity. What do you think of—er—Marstown? Like it, aw? Really?" (pulling his moustache with an air of surprise; that being the first expression occurring to him). "Sorry this ball is put off, eh?" (tenderly rearranging his moustache, to console it for its late ill-treatment). "What, nevaw been at a ball before! Oh, come, Lee; I say—eh, Smiler, what do you say—eh? Come! that will be something quite fresh, then; delightfully novel, 'pon my word." (This sentence left Miss Dimity wondering whether she was to be the delightful novelty to him, or the ball to her.)

"Come, I will tell you what it is—er," went on the willowy warrior, suddenly speaking with a momentary animation. "We—er—that is to say, some of our fellows and myself—have been thinking, don't you know, of—ah! giving a small dance next week, to make up for the disappointment of all you young ladies. You'll come, eh?—won't you?"

"Oh, thank you!" cried Daisy, overjoyed. "And how pleased Mrs. Cox and her daughters will be to go, too.

They were quite as much vexed as I was about Jack's—about the ball, I mean, being put off."

A quick look passed between Captain O'Donoghue and Mr. Lee.

"Mrs. Cox. Oh! aw, yes! of course. You are staying with her. Yes, er—pray tell them, too, how delighted I shall be to see them also, Miss—er—Dimity. Tuesday next. You won't mind not getting a card, eh? We want to keep it so very small. . . . But you'll be sure to come, won't you?"

And, with a dulcet smile and bland bow, the gentle knight moved away to give joy to the hearts of some few others of the fair sex that were doubtless, he felt, already beginning to suffer jealous pangs.

"I say! What an impression you have gone and made, Miss Dimity! *Veni! vidi! vici!* Ho, ho, ho! Excuse my laughing, won't you? You know old Dimity and I are such friends," exclaimed the Smiler, with a gaiety as if he was longing to execute a mirthful break-down, and that only respect for Daisy restrained his joyous effervescence. Then, in a suddenly solemn whisper:

"Do you know that O'Donoghue has so many girls most desperately gone about him; and they'll all be terribly cut out when they find he has asked you. And this is to be such a small dance, that he must have given you all his cards, as they are each only asking five or six guests."

"But did he not mean to ask the Coxes, too?" asked Daisy, distressed. "How could I go otherwise? I did not know what else he could mean. I cannot go without my chaperon."

"Quite right, quite right," said young Lee, most consolingly. "Of course you would not; but, mind you, lots of the Marstown girls would—I mean they would have accepted, and run chance for a chaperon, or have got some lady who was, by way of looking after ten or twelve others, to take them, too. But with you it is a different thing, certainly. And old O'Donoghue was delighted, I could see. Oh, excuse me for chaffing you, won't you?—but you are an Irresistible One."

"Oh, please, I must go back to Mrs. Cox at once," exclaimed Daisy, in a hurry, seeing that lady making small, fluttering signals to them.

She was, as it were, clucking like an elegant hen anxious

to gather the stranger chicken under her wing; but not taking any heed of her own stray brood.

At a little distance, Gascoigne now stood utterly alone among the crowd; having successfully contrived to retire with politeness, after acting chorus to Mrs. Cox's "Dead March" over the late, lamented, unknown colonel, as uttered, *con grazio e spirito*, by that lady.

Now, seeing his friends, Lee and Jack Dimity, approaching, he too slowly returned; and Daisy by-and-by found him near her side.

"Well, Miss Dimity, do you find this amuses you as much as you thought?" he asked, with a quiet air that approached boredom, in one of the softer intervals between the crashes of the brass band, playing "The Turkish Patrol."

She, who had been listening in an ecstasy of pleasure, turned round vexed. All the pleasure went out of her at sight of this *bête noire*, who kept silently recalling the most embarrassing and annoying incident, almost, of her whole life.

"I am enjoying myself very much—very much indeed, thank you." Trying not to let her voice seem too severe in disapprobation of himself. "But you seem not to care to hear such good music; nor to see all these people, though I suppose they are your friends. I wonder you came at all."

"I have hardly any friends, or at least very few friends in Marstown, Miss Dimity. And as to coming—remember, you advised me to come," with a deprecating smile, that, however, might have been thought gently sarcastic, if anyone not versed in human expression chose to think so.

Daisy chose to think so; she was utterly aggravated. Why, oh! why should Jack's dearest friend, who seemed at first so nice—why should he seem always fated to make her look foolish, resolved to misinterpret her?

"I—I—I never for a moment asked you to come. You must not think that," she responded, with anger-gleaming eyes, drawing up her plump little person with intense dignity.

"Miss Dimity, I never for a moment supposed you had. I said 'advised' me."

Thus ended the conversation between this jarring young man and maiden, for at that moment they were interrupted by the Smeeth family.

CHAPTER XI.

Cost.—In manner and form following, sir, all those three; I was seen with her in the manor-house, sitting with her upon the form, and taken following her into the park . . . . .

King.—*The time when? About the sixth hour; when beasts most graze, birds best peck, and men sit down to that nourishment which is called supper.*

The Smeeth family, father, mother, and daughters, having caught sight of Gascoigne—and secondarily of Daisy, who was considered a distinguished stranger—bore down upon the prey.

First came the mother—an honest, broad-faced soul, but quite unwieldy from stoutness; one of those good feather-bed mothers one often sees panting in black bombazeen attire; then the two young ladies, with several satellites in the persons of Marstown young men, employed in attorneys' or other offices. These the Misses Smeeth clearly only kept in tow till Gascoigne, young Dimity, or Lee should be lured, or might deign to take their places.

Behind, marshalling all, came Smeeth father—thick-set, snowy-haired, and moustachioed; with the gash of an old wound still scarring his cheek. He was, however, not a bad specimen of an old soldier, thought Daisy, as her acquaintances, rushing up eagerly, shook hands, and asked leave, with a filial deference that really did them credit, to introduce her to their father and mother.

Colonel Smeeth's bow was of the nature of a paternally-meant military salute. Mrs. Smeeth, however, stretching out her fat hands, imprisoned one of Daisy's in a warm, prolonged clasp, while softly wheezing before she spoke.

"Deary me! So this is Mr. Dimity's sister; how very nice!" she observed, as if speaking from above her treble chin with difficulty. "Well, now, I must tell you, my dear, as, indeed, I was sayin' to himself the other day, although, indeed, I am afraid he didn't quite understand me, on account of Mrs. Cox calling him away before I had got to the end of what I was explainin'. (A most elegant woman, my dear, and bein' a cousin of yours besides, not that I wish to say a thing against her for a moment, for her fly was at the door, and she offered him a seat, and called out she couldn't wait; although, indeed, I thought she might, the horse being not at all fresh, and me in the midst of talk

with your good brother, who didn't seem since either to understand——")

Certainly, poor Daisy did not feel either that she in the least understood. But Mrs. Smeeth, pausing to take another long, long wheeze, her eldest daughter came to the rescue; being well used to the task of making her parent's rambling discourses intelligible to the public.

"My mother means that, if we had known in time that Mr. Dimity wanted to get you put up for this ball, we should have been just as glad as the Coxes to give you a shake-down and house-room too—only we didn't know."

While thanking for this proffered hospitality, its recipient inwardly wondered.

But now Gascoigne created a diversion of topic by civilly making himself in turn apparent to Mrs. Smeeth, as she gazed at the world over her three chins.

"Ah, captain, deary me! How-de-doo?" she cried, with a start of slow surprise; and then retaining his hand likewise, looked inquiringly at her daughters: "Have you asked the captain for our little party, girls?"

"No, for I didn't think he'd care to come. I've never seen him at muffin-worries," said Easy, in a loud tone, of which the decision could not be doubted, adding: "Would you——? It's only a tea-fight we are having after this music is over."

"Now, deary me, Essie, that's not the way to ask him" (with a reproachful, heaving sigh). "Many young men nowadays, as they've often and often told me, would far prefer a friendly mutton-cup and chop of tea—bless me! I mean the other way—to sittin' night after night at a grand dull mess-dinner. Now, what do you say, Captain Gascoigne?"

Poor Gascoigne's face looked so politely dismal at thoughts of the mutton-chop and cup of tea that Daisy, who had begun to study her accuser's expression, could hardly forbear smiling.

He murmured:

"I am afraid, Mrs. Smeeth, I am such a creature of habit! I hope you will forgive me for not coming to your tea, but really I so seldom go anywhere——"

"I know, I know; you like your dinner. Deary me! you are all sad young men; no domestic tastes; never out of your clubs. Not meaning you, Captain Gascoigne—for I do say to your face, as behind your back (ask my girls!)

that of all the officers that have been quartered here this many a day, there have been few so civil to an old woman like me, and always quite the gentleman (ask my girls now!) And what I wanted to say is—if you do change your mind and come in, don't be thinkin' about your clothes now" (with another wheeze). "We never mind about dress at my little parties, never; we're quite *au naturel!!*"

For all his politeness, Gascoigne stood transfixed. Then he met Daisy's eye, who at that could contain herself no longer, turning to hide her mirth by seeming to admire the foliage of a laurustinus.

"Are you a *connoisseur* in plants, as well as a good French scholar, Miss Dimity?" said Gascoigne presently in her ear.

Daisy, starting, saw by the laugh in the speaker's eyes, and a twitching of his moustache, that on one point at least they were in unison.

"Know flowers! Miss Dimity knows them so well she calls them all by their Christian names," struck in Smiler Lee, who had followed them; evidently considering Daisy his especial property for the day, and therefore allowing himself to interrupt them.

In turn Easy Smeeth followed Mr. Lee to the much-sought laurustinus bushes, when she surprised them all by a sudden, violent, though suppressed giggle.

"Look here, through this," she energetically whispered to them, while separating the branches. "Look quick; all of you!"

They all peeped through the hole she made, and saw Mr. Jones and Miss Pussy Cox on a bench hidden behind the bushes. They were seated with their backs to the spectators, apparently imagining, ostrich-like, that because not seeing they were unseen. Pussy's back hair swept, in one chignon and two ringlets, over the back of the bench; her eyes were softly upturned to Mr. Jones's inanimate black ones. The young man's expression, generally bovine, now looked sheepish; perhaps because Pussy's head was very, very near reclining on his shoulder, and he apparently did not know how to behave under the trying circumstances, his mind being full of solemn warnings from Major Hodge, his mentor.

"Come away! I think it is very wrong—I mean, is it quite right of us to be peeping?" uttered Daisy hotly.

Most of the others chaffed and giggled. But Gascoigne said:

"Miss Dimity is right. We had no right to look." He said this so simply nobody took offence. It was his general way to include himself among the offenders when quietly putting in a word against anything unkind said or done by people.

"Come here, then, Miss Dimity; if you won't peep behind bushes. Come round this walk behind here. There can be no harm in our doing that, surely," cried Easy Smeeth, rather jeeringly.

The grounds, like most squares, had a few bushes at each corner, and a circumscribing gravel walk. It was to the bushes at the opposite corner she now led the unsuspecting party along the walk. Just at the corner, therefore, somewhat screened by more laurustinus, was another bench —but it had not been removed into hiding—and on it (more in the open than Pussy, according to her character) sat poor Fuzzy Cox and Major Hodge.

Her tight, neat hair-plaits, too, were near the major's shoulder; but this seemed more his fault, or owing to his size. Her eyes looked up into those of her companion; but differently, since with real sadness. And his returned her glance with a false sweetness—a honeyed gaze of flirtation, as it seemed, even to the most unsophisticated of the lookers-on. Major Hodge was not very like a spider—unless it were a stout, handsome spider, unknown to British housemaids—yet to Daisy's eyes her friend, for she already really liked Fuzzy Cox, made her think of a poor, pretty fly she longed to frighten away. As their party passed these two with real or affected demureness, Daisy, whose feelings of partisanship for her sex were ruffled, looked suspiciously round at some of the rest; and caught—she could hardly have believed her eyes—Major Hodge giving a positive wink to Smiler Lee.

She was so thunderstruck at such conduct that when Easy Smeeth asked her, with a significant laugh, what she thought of the gentleman on the bench, she answered, in a hurry, with a little disapproving shake of the head:

"I don't like him at all. I don't think he is a nice sort of man."

"Hullo, Daisy! what has come over you? I never heard you speak a bad word of any living soul before.

Hodge is a very good fellow; and, besides, what do you know of men? There are not many round Elm Hall," cried Jack.

"Are you not rather too outspoken, Miss Dimity? You have no idea how people repeat such observations," whispered Gascoigne in a kindly tone, giving the warning to his friend's young sister in a way that even her readiness to take offence with him could not resent.

"You are quite right, indeed; and, as Jack says, perhaps I don't know what I am talking about," she humbly answered. "Very likely Major Hodge is a very good man, if one only knew him better."

"They say second thoughts are best; on the other hand, first impressions are often truest," was all Gascoigne's reply, as private as his warning.

"Major Hodge is an awful old flirt, I think; but no end of a friend of mine since this morning. Let me tell you all —no! not now! it will be better fun after tea to see your friends', the Coxes', faces," struck in Easy oracularly, with a loud laugh. "D'ye know his nickname; given him because he is so fat? Hodge-podge! Isn't it fine! He can't stand it, you know; likes to be called the Handsome Hodge, as some girl who was dreadfully in love with him once called him. I'll have to call him that to-night."

Call him that—! Little Miss Dimity felt quite dismayed; then wondered was she too prudish; and wondered again what sort of society was this that Jack seemed so much at home in. The rest of the gentlemen, somehow, seemed rather uninterested, while Miss Smeeth thus discoursed of their fellow-man.

"There are the Misses Silverthorne," observed Gascoigne, pointing out two old ladies, dressed daintily and precisely alike.

They had snow-white hair; and wore silver-gray dresses; little bonnets and mantillas trimmed with fine old black lace, The handsome lace may have been a little out of place, seeing their gowns were of a cheap material. And yet it was an evidence of gentility, like a carved coat-of-arms over a moss-covered gateway.

"Aren't they two old cats?" cried Easy.

"How charming they look! I should like to know them so much," Daisy exclaimed at the same moment.

"I should like very much to make you both acquainted.

Could it be managed to-day, I wonder?" answered Gascoigne, speaking to Daisy only; and in his slow, courteous way he moved a little towards the old ladies, preparing to raise his hat. But no doubt he was too slow, for they both passed by without recognising him; being, apparently, gently meditating on the afterglow of the sunset sky.

Gascoigne put his glass in his eye, being short-sighted like half the world, and looked at them unavailingly; while Easy jeeringly tittered.

"They did not see me. It cannot be done to-day, but I will try another time," he calmly said, returning to Daisy; and then, taking his leave of her first, added aside: "There was something you wished to say to me; could you not tell me now? Is it anything I can do for you? You said that, since yesterday you had been thinking——"

"No, no, I can't say it—at least, not now," uttered Daisy, in fresh confusion, getting red again at once.

Gascoigne bowed, and gravely departed.

"How do you like him? Tell me, dear," asked Miss Easy, in luring tones, lovingly linking her arm in Daisy's, while shrewdly observing the colour in the latter's cheeks.

"Not much," pettishly said that foolish, small person who, five minutes ago, but for his last question, might have answered differently. She glanced round to make sure Jack was not near. "He rather frightens me, I don't know why; and he has a way of making me feel as if I had done wrong things when I've not, that—that I can't explain." (The Army List in the work-box; indeed, no!)

"He is a prig, child; that's it. Oh, yes; I liked him yesterday, because he was kind, but to-day he goes and spoils all that by being too stiff to come to our little spread. He is, certainly, too fine a gentleman for me."

CHAPTER XII.

The man that hails you Tom and Jack,
And proves by thumps upon your back
How he esteems your merit,
Is such a friend that one had need
Be very much his friend indeed
To pardon or to bear it.

"We'll have high jinks at tea," said the two Misses Smeeth, heralding the party into their house. It was a larger house

than that of the Coxes; but very dingy and close-smelling, and so dark that, the men being awkward, all stumbled on an unsuspected step at the corner of the stairs.

"What on earth do you keep this man-trap here for, Miss Smeeth?" growled Jack.

"I've nearly broken my nose," added the Smiler, with rueful gaiety, having pitched head foremost against the wall. "It wouldn't matter for you, Dimity, you know; but with me it is really more serious."

The mirth that ensued over Jack's expression at his imputed ugliness was only diverted when he asked: "Well, Miss Grace, how is the clock to-day? I never come here that some of you ladies are not changing it." Instantly Grace Smeeth jumped up, and began slily putting back the hands of the clock on the drawing-room mantelpiece.

"We were too long listening to the band; but it was all your faults, so you must all hold your tongues, and father will never know," she explained.

Amid a fresh roar of laughter, a cracked tea-bell rang violently downstairs, and the colonel, attired in a militia mess-jacket, entered the room and glanced at the clock.

"To the minute!" he uttered, approvingly. "Military punctuality, gentlemen! Ah, that's the way I bring up my girls, you see; it makes everyone of them fit to be soldiers' wives."

"Papa's an old fool," muttered Easy aside, with her usual elegant freedom; that, however, as everybody could see, was compatible with much rough and ready affection for the said old fool.

"I'll tell him about the clock—I'll tell——" threatened Major Hodge in a loud whisper, whereupon ensued playful hustling of him by Miss Grace, with much pretended alarm, whilst he made many mock-audible ejaculations of "Colonel—I'll tell you—What's the right time," etc.

"Tea, tea. It will be cold! so come, please, ladies and gents," said the colonel, with an anxious air of punctuality, offering his arm to Daisy.

"But Mrs. Cox——" timidly observed the latter, glancing round, and for the first time perceiving that lady's absence.

"Mamma! Oh, we told her she might go home and look after papa's supper to-night, for we are quite able to take care of ourselves home," Fuzzy loudly explained.

"Or else your brother can chaperon you, and you two can chaperon all the rest."

"Wait a bit, Miss Dimity. Take off your hat, won't you?" cried one of the Smeeths, diving at our heroine; for she was quite bewildered.

And then all stumbled downstairs again, past the unlucky step, with unwashed hands, somewhat to Daisy's secret dismay. For, though her own little fingers were spotlessly white, no one could help noticing that the colonel, who sat at the foot of the table beside her, wore his nails in deep mourning.

The room, though fairly large, was dingy in the extreme; the wall-paper, of a green tadpole pattern on buff ground, was grimy; the paint cracked; the bell-rope broken; the table-cloth bore rather unaccountable creases, and a spot or two suggesting (as was indeed true) that it had done duty at one great tea-party before, and had then been put by to grace once more this one. But nothing else could distract poor Daisy's big eyes from wandering, with a horrible fascination, always back to the colonel's unpharisaical hands. And he had begun cutting the big loaf, too!

At last, as if from some electric communication of thought, Smiler Lee, who sat on Daisy's other side, also remarked what was amiss.

"Nasty, isn't it?" he murmured, sympathetically, in Daisy's ear.

He seemed to consider it a breach of attention on his part that day, if he disregarded her for a moment. Then, always disposed to be merry, and have for his motto, "Laugh while you can":

"But never mind, this is not one of the "hupper succles' of Marstown society, as you will soon find, Miss Dimity. Good old fellow in his way; but what can you expect—he was only a ranker."

"A what?"

"A private in the army; got on to be sergeant; and was sent then to drill a Militia regiment, in which, after trying for a lifetime, he must have taught them something, for he became an officer."

"But I honour him for that," Daisy murmured back earnestly, being very reverent of the claims to respect of those who rose by honest labour—like her grandfather.

"Still, it was only a Militia regiment," gloomily objected the Smiler. "Look at him now in that dirty old uniform, sitting beside you. He's never out of it; and it's never clean. Now *we* never like to go among ladies unless we have changed to mufti."

"Yes, I know. Of course that is a very nice feeling."

Miss Dimity did not like to add that she had a secret weakness for uniform. Not the blue postman-like garb, but real red uniform, helmet, sword, and all; and, whenever it was possible, cocked hat and feathers.

It was so becoming! But Jack having once laughed uproariously at this feminine reason, she delicately suppressed her opinion.

The meal was going on in serious earnest. There were the promised mutton chops, cut nobly big, but rather rich as to gravy, as one of the young ladies expressed it; cold pork, and some uncanny-looking salad, at which Mrs. Cox—good housewife—would have shivered. Also, to crown the feast, a pair of skinny fowls, which Mrs. Smeeth was hospitably inviting everyone to partake of.

"Now you'll all have some chicken."

"A manifest impossibility," muttered Jack Dimity to Birdie, who instantly gave a little shriek of mirth that dismayed the young man; for, though fond of a mock-growl, Jack was a gentleman. But there was plenty of bread, plenty of marmalade and treacle, plenty of tea—to Major Hodge's comparative comfort, who remarked across the table to Daisy:

"I'm a regular whale at tea; are you? Beg pardon; I mean, don't you like it? Did you ask me to have another cup, ma'am?" to Mrs. Smeeth. "Well, since you are so pressing, I think I will have a second one, ha! ha!"

"Your fourth, you mean," cried Easy. "Mother, you may put another spoonful in the pot; for last time Major Hodge took seven big cups to his own cheek!"

The amount of slang talked surprised Daisy, who, brought up among green pastures in old-fashioned ways—and the Tribe of Gad not yet old enough to go to school—now felt herself to seem a purist, if not pedantic in speech.

The fun grew fast and furious among the young people. The jokes and talk were, however, all concerning other Marstown folk—mostly other rival young ladies—and whether the attentions of their soldier swains were or were

not slackening. Daisy soon found she was not attended to when, by putting in a modest question or two, she tried to take a share in the conversation.

Mrs. Smeeth, looming large at the far end of the table, cared for nothing beyond her own eating and drinking; except the teacups of the rest.

But the colonel tried his best to take part in his guests' and daughters' jokes, with an energy worthy of a better cause. For, being a little deaf, he would sit with one hand raised to his ear, as if making a new kind of stiff military salute; and would very likely shout out loud, in his bluff, honest tones:

"Ha! ha! very good indeed, Lee," or "Dimity," at the wrong part of the story.

It seemed to Daisy that the young men did not quite like the familiar way in which the poor colonel used their names without prefix; as if wishing to assure himself by the sound that he was their equal. They themselves always answered him as "Colonel Smeeth," with some coolness in their deference. Indeed, Major Hodge, in a cavalier way, almost ignored his existence. At last the latter—doubtless annoyed that the good man of the house was constantly strenuously inquiring what they were all talking about—began a story, which he assured the colonel was capital, and which he accordingly directed full into his good ear.

It was of an old lady—his aunt, as he lightly averred—who, being very deaf, never went out to a dinner-party without her ear-trumpet. Unfortunately, it once happened that when a very young footman came round to her with soup, and asked: "White or ox-tail, ma'am?" she, being very absent-minded and busy talking, popped up her trumpet to hear what he was saying; upon which—ha, ha, ha!—he, thinking it was a funnel, poured the soup down it.

"First-rate that—eh? Wasn't it, colonel?" asked Major Hodge, with a sly twinkle in his eye and a great chuckle.

But the colonel did not seem to see it. He laughed indeed, but his face got red, and he mopped it a good deal; and Daisy saw he was so much disconcerted that he retired gradually from the general *mêlée*.

Pitying him for this, and also—being very soft-hearted—for the mild contempt his vulgarities brought upon him from his other guests, she kindly tried to draw him into conversation with herself.

The colonel seemed a little morose at first, but, gradually unthawing, began to explain to her the niceties of drill; on which subject he accidentally discovered her amazing ignorance. By-and-by he was so engrossed with the subject that he would not allow her attention to waver a second to the Smiler, who still tried occasionally to engage it.

A fresh little amusement had now been introduced at table.

Just as Lee was about raising to his lips an especially delicious morsel of buttered hot-cake topped with marmalade, Miss Grace Smeeth, who was on his farther side, whipped the dainty from him smartly and ate it. Instantly Major Hodge, who was beyond herself, pounced on the most appetising crust on her plate: and so in turn everyone began appropriating his or her neighbour's food. It was high jinks! as the young ladies had prophesied.

Only the father, and mother, and Daisy were spared, the last as being under the host's immediate protection; on the whole, she was not sorry, then, at being so monopolised by the old soldier; although before she had felt it was hard to be so held fast during almost the whole time of the long meal—while Mr. Lee was casting such mock-sorrowful glances too.

CHAPTER XIII.

Beat—You had musty victual, and he hath holp to eat it: he is a very valiant trencher-man, he hath an excellent stomach.

Mess—And a good soldier too, lady.

Beat—And a good soldier to a lady.

Well! the highest of high teas and high jinks, too, must come to an end; and this one slowly ended when Major Hodge had had his seventh well-sweetened cup of tea.

The ladies adjourned to the drawing-room. After a storm followed calm; and while some of the gentlemen smoked a cigar below, the others were detained by the colonel to talk "shop," somewhat to their disgust—since, after all, he had only been most of his life in a far from smart Militia regiment.

Meanwhile, Daisy had leisure to observe this second specimen of a Marstown drawing-room:—of a room in which her friends' dearest friends would be naturally supposed to show evidences of their pursuits, good taste,

and fancy; since it was both their best apartment and also the one they really lived in.

It seemed to have sufficient size and height. But here also, as in the dining-room, the general effect was dingy; while all the old, worn chairs were smothered with coarse crochet-work antimacassars, or gaudy, soiled woollen ones, like old wives' shoulders going to market.

Daisy shuddered with the fine feelings of a latter-day dainty embroideress. She only pardoned "chair-backs," as she called them, when worked in crewel wools or silks in high-art shades, according to the latest School of Art designs; so the little woollen shawls made her feel dolorous.

As to the rest of the room, the walls had once been papered in white, with a chaste pattern (as the present advertisements say) of gray nothing-in-particular running all over it; but the white ground had turned gray, too, not to say grimy, from dust, and the pattern had become somewhat merged. Daisy, looking at it, longed to set a stout-armed country wench or two to rub the walls properly clean; to take down the faded green curtains, with their baldequin valance at the top, of which the folds were plainly choke-full of dust. Gracious! what a "stour" she would raise!

Then, oh! for an hour of a housemaid's broom and tea-leaves on this frayed carpet; and open-air shaking to the heavy covers of the two bulky old tables, on one of which covers the young ladies of the family plainly wiped their pens after writing; while the other bore the marks of the colonel and Mrs. Smeeth's less frequent caligraphy, but more frequent libations of tea and oblations of crumbs to the household lares.

The marble chimney-piece was gray, and of a spotty nature, distantly recalling brawn.

Its adornments consisted in, first: an elegant group of three white nymphs all a-tiptoe, carefully shaded by a bell-glass, seldom dusted. On either hand a candlestick, from which depended what the tribe of Gad called glass jingles. Further, under another glass, a wax Spanish matador, guarding one corner, visibly decrepit between time and heat, in spite of the glass-case which kept about his feet several bits of his person or garments; (these it was apparently to be hoped that he himself would pick up in time, since no one else seemed likely to do so). A gipsy, smiling lightly over her similar misfortunes, graced the other corner.

Besides, there were several brackets, wearing petticoats of soiled Berlin worsted-work, and carefully upholding, for some mysterious reason, objects of very mean value. Berlin-wool cushions, too, displaying hideous roses on green ground-work, lay around; with little ends of feathers stealing out of the stuffing.

As to books, a bundle of the *Family Herald* lay certainly on one of the big tables. Likewise a good many broken-backed yellow railway novels were also there, mixed indiscriminately with Mrs. Smeeth's half-knitted coarse socks for the colonel, the *Army and Navy Gazette*, and *Broad Arrow*—likewise the colonel's property. Lastly, *Myra's Journals*, dogs'-eared at those pages where recommendations are given for removing sunburn, or imparting golden tints to the locks; and again where kindly answers from the editorial office told G. or E. S. (Grace or Esther Smeeth) how their new Jersey bodices should be trimmed, and their old skirts, in reply to anxious queries, made to suit the former.

Add to all this a general flavour of closed windows, and meal-time whiffs from the kitchen—that was the Smeeths' drawing-room.

So soon as the gentlemen entered a general movement of joy took place among the young ladies.

The colonel and his wife, like a couple of good old cronies, at once retired to the back drawing-room, installing themselves there in two big arm-chairs—one to knit, the other to slumber. Grace Smeeth sat down to the old cracked piano, and began playing a waltz (the only music she knew), and dancing seemed imminent, when the colonel called out, in good-humoured grumbling:

"Eh—eh, girls! Could you not leave us a few minutes in peace, till I get my snooze?"

"Yes, yes; let him have his sleep," cried all the gentlemen with rather suspicious alacrity, eyeing the carpet; and Essie, who was sharp enough to divine their real wishes, proposed:

"Well then, if we are not to dance, we must have games."

This was agreed to, and the games began.

At first they consisted in playing proverbs, "earth, air, fire, and water," "throwing up lights," or such-like harmless amusements, in which Daisy joined with much relish. But by-and-by their character became romping, and "hide and

go seek,"—"hiding by twos and twos"—as was distinctly insisted on by Major Hodge, was proposed and carried with loud applause.

They drew lots which couple should go out first. Then, with some tremors, Daisy found that she and Mr. Lee were to be the first to leave the lights and society of the drawing-room for the general gloom that prevailed though the rest of the house. Once outside the door, the darkness looked so dark that she disliked even more the idea, to the Smiler's wonder; till he good-naturedly hit on a plan to please her, yet fulfil the game. This was to softly open the back drawing-room door, and the instant the hue-and-cry was given, to slip in by this one, while the rest were bound to emerge from the other door. It was a simple idea, but succeeded admirably.

Noiselessly they crept in, behind the backs of the unsuspecting host and hostess, and sat down unseen in the next room most comfortably to chat, whilst distant noises showed the chase was being pursued from cellar to garret.

"How unkind it was of you to flirt at tea-time with the old colonel! I had never a chance of getting a word in. Oh, you are—excuse me for laughing at you, Miss Dimity, but you *are* an irresistible one!" began the Smiler, whose attentions to Daisy had been indeed unremitting, so far as in him lay; but who never seemed to be serious enough to be taken *au sérieux* by anyone.

Miss Dimity returned that it had been a simple act of charity and due courtesy on her part; for which, she was sure, the poor man was grateful.

"So he ought to have been," said the Smiler emphatically; "but (with a sigh) I don't believe the old gentleman could appreciate it."

At this moment they heard the colonel waking up in the back drawing-room.

"Well, Mary Ann, that's a nice-looking little girl that was beside me at tea, young Dimity's sister."

Start of both the listeners. A little bridling air of "I told you so," on Daisy's part; and a deferential nod, implying "Always right, enchanting princess," from the Smiler.

"But she's not a patch on either of our girls," continued the proud parent, disburdening his heart, in fond confidence that they two were alone. "Why, our ones were having all the fun with the young men, and kept them going all the

time. Didn't they, now? None of the young fellows looked at her, so I had to talk to her myself. Not but that I generally like to be in the fun that's going with the rest; but I didn't like her to seem out in the cold, you know, or to feel cut out too much, eh?"

"No, Smeeth; of course. Quite right, my dear," replied Mrs. Smeeth, who seemed to have taken up the slumberous tendencies her lord had just dropped; adding, with a gleam of liveliness, "Ah! there's not many can hold a candle to our girls."

Fresh interchange of looks between the listeners! But now it was quite an amazed, almost indignant flash from Daisy's big blue eyes. The Smiler, on the contrary, noiselessly lifted his knees to his chin, and rocked himself in an ecstacy of ungenerous mirth. Then he stuffed all but one little corner of a superfine silk handkerchief into his mouth, to stifle the outbursts of his laughter, only withdrawing it to murmur weakly at last:

"Oh! do excuse me; but if you could see your own face! You look exactly like a good-natured baby disgusted with the world, and trying ever so hard to get into a temper; but you can't manage it—he, he, he!"

When the rest came back and discovered them, fresh emissaries were despatched into the household darkness. But as these happened at times to be Major Hodge, or Mr. Jones, with either of the Smeeths, it became plain that the Miss Coxes' feelings were liable to be stirred up, if not outraged. Certainly, all had equal chances of subsequent meetings in darksome encounters round corners; breathless scurries down passages and stairs; jostlings, scufflings, efforts to be caught and to escape.

It was to be hoped they liked it; certainly one person did not, and that was Daisy.

Her terror lest Mr. Jones or Major Hodge might spring out from some horrible curtain and catch her round the waist (as she had seen done to the others) was all the greater that she perceived it would be thought ludicrous. So she crept so timidly behind all the others that Jack observed it, and said, with a sort of self-accusing approval of her shyness, and dubious encouragement:

"What a frightened little mouse you are! Keep close to me all the time, and no one shall hurt you."

One curious fact was that, during these high revels, two

thoughts, actually about Captain Gascoigne—and those contradictory ones—came into Daisy's mind.

The one was devout thanksgiving that he had refused that little party: for she would have been deadly ashamed for him to have seen her engaged in such romps.

The other was regret that, after all, he had not come; for she felt sure, in his presence, no one could have misbehaved very much. He had such an indescribable way of making her feel as if he thought so highly of womankind, that she half-unconsciously strained herself to meet his expectations.

At last, flushed and panting, the whole crew returned to the drawing-room, and flung themselves to rest in more or less graceful attitudes in the crazy arm-chairs.

There was a pause. What was to come next?

Then Essie Smeeth looked maliciously across at Major Hodge. He was amusing himself by casting tender glances at Fuzzy, whose jealousy had been emitting little flashes during the crepuscular sports. Poor Fuzzy! If she had been ridiculously jealous, she now at once looked as absurdly happy. Her healthy face was all conscious of it, and her cheeks were like red winter-apples glowing under the deceptive warmth of that gaze.

Now it was Essie's turn to feel the smart of pin-prick wounds to her vanity and emulation—the outer integuments of her heart, which, like too many of the Marstown girls, she often supposed to be part of the kernel—(that might, indeed, with time, run risk of becoming inseparable from it!)

"I say, do you remember all laughing yesterday at a hole in Grace's stockings?" she suddenly asked. And her voice heralded so plainly some further important announcement, that everyone at once sat up, all attention, excepting Major Hodge and Mr. Jones. "Well, I expect you'll all laugh at the wrong side of your mouths over our stockings now, for many a long day!—owing to the goodness of two kind friends" (in a tone of triumph).

Looks of wonder from all the party, excepting from Major Hodge and Mr. Jones. The latter, indeed, wore an expression of bashfulness at conscious merit; while the major, glancing apprehensively at Fuzzy, tried to steer clear of the impending crisis by interrupting with an awkward laugh.

"Oh, come! come now, Miss Essie; that's not fair,

'pon my honour. That will do. You promised not to tell" (this last in a whisper).

But he little knew Miss Essie, when the affair in hand was to discomfit a rival.

She pounced upon a brown paper parcel, ostentatiously hidden near (if the expression may be pardoned); and, pulling it open, displayed a dozen and a half of gay stockings, which she flourished under the very eyes of Fuzzy and Pussy Cox.

"There!—that is what Major Hodge and Mr. Jones bought for us this very morning."

The Cox family seemed dumbstruck.

"By Jingo! the fat is all in the fire, now," thus Daisy heard the major murmur confidentially to Smiler Lee, with a fatuous grin. "I must beat a retreat, or these two young women will tear me in pieces between them. When two girls get jealous about a man he has devilish hard cards to play, to please them both."

This revelation acted truly like a thunderbolt upon the Cox sisters.

They, indeed, tried to recover themselves, and uttered due little expressions of admiration tipped with poison, as "Lovely!—What, all of them striped round in colours—won't you feel rather like the clowns in Hengler's Circus, or as if you had zebra's legs, dear?"

But Fuzzy said, with a frankness that was blunt and all her own:

"Well, I'm sure we ought all to be glad you've got them—for, *you wanted them very badly!*"

After this, the Cox party were subdued; the games had lost their flavour; and they intimated that it was more than time to depart.

The Smeeths, on the other hand, with suppressed triumph, expressed wonder they should go so soon; adding, with hospitable *empressement:*

"But at least, Major Hodge, you'll stay—and Mr. Jones."

To remain behind seemed wisest to the two latter gallant warriors; whom Fuzzy and Pussy now regarded with high heads and haughty, averted gaze, whilst their colour was again of a deeper glow than its usual robust hue.

Jack Dimity, of course, prepared to escort his sister and her friends home. And the ever-gallant Smiler felt it his duty likewise to accompany the sister of his friend.

As they went homewards through the silent streets, both Pussy and Fuzzy were extremely silent, and could not be much roused, even by the presence of their guardians.

But Birdie was in wildest spirits.

She danced along the echoing pavement; chaffed Jack; tried to withdraw Mr. Lee's attentions from Daisy to herself; and finally rushed up to one or two houses and rang the bells, before they knew what she was about (a lark in which the Smiler seemed much tempted to join her, although he still remained faithful to Daisy's side).

"Oh! Baby dear, do be quiet," Daisy could hear Fuzzy murmur; although it must have been inaudible to others. "One would think that, when we are vexed, it is bread-and-treacle for you!"

To which peculiar saying, Miss Birdie pertly replied:

"And do either of you really think I ought to cry because you do? Thank goodness! my men don't throw me over like that."

CHAPTER XIV.

Then, Chloe, still go on to prate
Of thirty-six and thirty-eight;
Pursue your trade of scandal-picking,
Your hints that Stella is no chicken;
Your inuendoes when you tell us
That Stella loves to talk with fellows.

Next morning there was a constant succession of young lady visitors at the Cox family mansion.

These were not received in the drawing-room; which the Cox girls declared, with some truth, their mother kept so terribly tidy that no one could be comfortable in it. It was, indeed, even painfully precise.

Each morning its faded but elegant mistress with her own hands re-arranged the dozen of high walnut chairs on the precise squares of carpet they were to occupy. And if her own elegant photograph-book had been moved a hair's-breadth from its proper solitary position on the one bare side of the oval walnut table, it was carefully replaced under a light glass-and-electro, but flowerless épergne; opposite an equally elegant empty inkstand—for ink, if used, has a trick of spoiling elegant tables. Mrs. Cox used to explain that her daughters, being so different from herself in the matter of tidiness, if she once allowed these arrangements

to be disturbed by an inch she would never be able to restore them to order. And there might have been some truth in that.

So the young lady friends, who had been "made free of the house," were wont to be received in a little "muddle-room," as the Cox girls called it, that was behind the drawing-room, and which Mrs. Cox generally designated as her daughters' boudoir.

On this especial morning, as pairs of girls after girls came in, were succeeded, and departed, they were each and all regaled with the delicious story of the Smeeths' present of stockings.

"Of stockings! Did ever anyone even hear of such a thing?" the Cox girls would exclaim, with lively gibes against their dear hostesses of yesterday; for both Fuzzy and Pussy had evidently resolved to make the best of the matter. "Really, although it is natural enough to receive some presents from gentlemen, still the line might be drawn at stockings."

And all the visitors, raising their hands, either literally or figuratively acquiesced; declaring—yes, really—the line might be drawn there.

"But surely Major Hodge and Mr. Jones are your men, girls?" observed one disagreeably-playful friend. "How very naughty of them to give presents to Essie and Grace!"

"Not at all. It was simple good-nature, when they saw how the poor things were in rags," smartly retorted Fuzzy, tossing her head and biting her lips. "Of course, they have given us little presents too. Major Hodge had a beautiful silver brooch made for me; with a rose—the badge of their regiment. You may have seen me wear it."

"What! that great big thing? Oh, yes, dear; constantly! It is never out of the side of your hat. I never knew it was a rose. (It is very like a cauliflower.)"

This last to the nearest other visitor.

"And Mr. Jones gave me a Welsh flannel-shawl; woven only in that part of Wales to which his family belongs," said Pussy pensively.

"But that," added both the sisters, each referring to her own gifts, "is a very different thing."

Of course the visitors all agreed with them.

And now the romps of the preceding evening at the Smeeths' house were equally described, and lightly derided.

Talk strengthened talk; so by-and-by Daisy was quite astonished to find how much the Coxes had secretly disapproved of last night's amusements. Plainly, she now found, they had disliked the sports as much as herself, but having, no doubt, more worldly wisdom, had successfully hidden the fact. As the conversation went on, she was quite glad to find that the Coxes had a so much higher standard of behaviour than she could have supposed. And, though sorry for the Smeeths, she was relieved, as to her good opinion of Marstown girls, to find all the visitors unanimous in condemning vaguely all misbehaviour on the part of others; and in declaring they never did such things.

In the full swing of this, the formerly-mentioned sprightly young person electrified Daisy by suddenly turning to her, playfully observing:

"And so you hid with Mr. Lee. He is quite your man, isn't he?"

"Oh, yes; he is quite her man. We saw you in the gardens yesterday," cried out everyone else, much amused at little Miss Dimity's dismay and instant blush.

The delicate and distant manner in which she and young Polly at Elm Hall had been wont to allude to shy possibilities of future admirers had been so different. Of course their notions of such things were founded on "Waverley Novels," and fostered in retirement; and of course they both were secretly convinced that Ivanhoe's descendants, the true latter-day knights, must be officers of whom their brother Jack—if not the most courtly—was a most honest squire and valiant. And now the talk turned on a dance, to be given that evening by a Mrs. Brandiston-Browne.

The fact that she was to be taken to it had been a little secret, only imparted to Daisy the day after her arrival. She had been immensely delighted on hearing it; and so she now told the playful young lady.

"Ah, yes. The Coxes, all three, wanted to go to it; so I know they had a little tiff with their mother, for she said one of them must give up to you. So they said nothing, I suppose, till they should have fought it out," replied the playful damsel, in light confidence. "Luckily, Mrs. Brandiston-Browne heard of you, and said you must come, too; of course—Mr. Dimity's sister. They didn't dare to ask her for an invite. They didn't know her very well, you see."

While Daisy sat rather silenced by this revelation, the Coxes kept talking very familiarly of dear Mrs. Brandiston-Browne; and of how very charming her parties were; and what a pity it was those among their dear friends present were not among the happy and select few invited.

Some of the young ladies in question seemed inclined to demur to all this, but were obliged to keep silence, lest they should be supposed envious. But the rest all vied with the Coxes in intimating that they were also admitted to the honour of Mrs. Brandiston-Browne's warmest friendship.

This lady appeared to Daisy to be considered as in one of Marstown's most select sets. And it was surprising how many sets there were; and with what mild contempt, or subdued envy, one set spoke of the other.

"And how do you like Marstown, Miss Dimity?" all the visitors of that morning kept asking.

When Miss Dimity replied that she liked it very much, it was all so new to her, such a different life from that in the country, several of the young ladies exclaimed: "Ah, yes! After all, there is nothing like a garrison town, is there?—always something gay going on, such good society." And, pleased with Daisy's ingenuous praises, they severally assured her she would find few places (after London) more musically, artistically, histrionically inclined than Marstown. For the officers were always giving amateur theatricals; and so many of them drew beautifully; and so many of them sang or played (by ear) in a small but most delightful and clever way.

Also the young ladies answered for themselves. They also loved music, adored painting, and were all dying to act with the officers; only that not to create jealousies these last always insisted on having professional actresses.

In fact—for all this, as for fashion, *ton*, and general *comme il faut*-ness, Daisy was given to understand Marstown and its inhabitants had few rivals.

And they all ended by saying or implying: "Certainly, Marstown has very good society; but then men make the society; and what men are so delightful as officers?"

This was all most instructive, as to the young ladies' view-point.

But every question has two sides. In another chapter we shall likewise see these much-flattered officers' views on the subject; and let us hope they will be equally flattering to the Marstown young ladies.

Jack Dimity was coming this day to have his lunch, at the Coxes' midday dinner. He had been warmly invited to come whenever he could, for, as Mrs. Cox kindly said: "Naturally his sister would like to see as much of him as possible."

But as yet, somehow, Daisy had not seen much of him; although he had come several times; his attention being perforce taken up with his young hostesses.

Mr. Lee had also been asked the previous night; asked less warmly, but, as Fuzzy was overheard explaining to her mother: "We could not well help it when he saw us home from the Smeeths, and he was standing by when we asked Mr. Dimity."

"Oh! well, in that case you did right to ask him."

Mrs. Cox replied in a cold manner that seemed strange to Daisy, who was sitting quietly near. She was so gentle and so very innocent about such matters that mother and daughters ventured to speak very naturally and carelessly before her; seeming to consider her rather wanting or foolish in worldly ways.

The Smiler, however, came not, eagerly as he had sprung at the invitation—for which, indeed, he had previously angled.

"So Mr. Lee has not arrived—faithless Mr. Lee!" softly smiled Mrs. Cox, as she floated downstairs to lunch. And all the girls echoed:

"Yes, indeed, he is always such a gay deceiver."

Somehow Daisy seemed to imagine (though it seemed foolish) that these sentences were directed at herself; but why, she could not imagine.

Jack explained his friend's absence, so far as he could, by saying the latter had been out since five that morning with his men at musketry—some miles away. And how on earth he had ever imagined he could get back for lunch was more than Jack could conceive.

In the middle of luncheon up rattled a hansom furiously, and the irrepressible Smiler shot himself out of it like a human missile; dismissed the driver with a joke in a jiffy; and, entering the room, as it seemed, the very same instant, exclaimed:

"Here I am! Got back from my work and jumped into mufti before you could say Jack Robinson, Mrs. Cox."

That lady welcomed him warmly to a place at her own

side; but so elegantly, who could imagine her saying "Jack Robinson?"

Instead she said, with tender solicitude:

"I fear you will injure your health, Mr. Lee. You do so much during the day; and to-night you will be at Mrs. Brandiston-Browne's, of course? If I were your mother I should be really uneasy about you."

"Yes, out at dinner to-night, and then to this ball; and to-morrow again up at five and out. Lunch and dinner somewhere else; always something—always keeping the ball rolling! I couldn't live without it, Mrs. Cox, I almost believe; though I sometimes think it will be the death of me," replied the Smiler, for five instants succeeding in pulling down the corners of his mouth, depressing the tips of Armado's "excrement"—his moustache—and dolorously rolling his eyes. The luxury of being pitied, and of pitying himself for that short space of time, being irresistible.

But he could stand it no longer than five seconds, and began a laugh again immediately.

"Ho, ho, ho! the fellows all wonder at how I do it. Oh! three hours' sleep, two hours' sleep, no sleep does me very often. Eh, Dimity, you often wonder how I keep it up, don't you?" acting a poke at Jack's ribs, though yards away.

"I wonder at you for being such a fool as not to give it up," quoth Jack rudely, trying to take down the conceit of his comrade-in-arms.

"You old growler! Is that the way you answer your best friend? You are the greatest ruffian!" gleefully laughed the Smiler, with imperturbable good-humour, and a jollity that infected even Mrs. Cox into smiling vulgarly broadly for once. "Don't believe him, any of you, pray! He would give anything to be able to keep it up as I do. Why, our colonel, I do assure you all, spoke to me only the other day about it:

"'You'll kill yourself, Lee,' he said, 'if you go on at this rate' (gloomily).

"'I hope not, sir,' I said. 'Anyhow, I've been at it for the last five or six years, and it hasn't killed me yet' (reviving at remembrance of that happy hit).

"'Well; but you will not be able to do your work properly,' was his next objection. (Good old fellow! speaks to me like a father.) Upon which I said: 'Sir, I have

always heard that the Duke of Wellington said his best officers were the greatest dandies.' He couldn't say another word" (triumphantly).

As they went upstairs to the drawing-room afterwards, young Lee managed to whisper in Daisy's ear:

"Ah, you demure little lady, I haven't been able to have a word with you yet. Do you know, I saw Mr. Jones this morning, and he told me you were a capital person to buy blue ribbon. Ha, ha, ha! ho, ho, ho! Oh, you naughty, naughty little Miss Dimity; what are you going to do with it?" Daisy begged him to hush in a fright; wondering how much he knew—what he guessed.

She tried to find out, being anxious on poor Fuzzy's account; but the provoking youth would only seat himself on the piano-stool, and, striking a few preliminary chords with a crash—playing only by ear, for he never had patience to learn his notes—he sang the old song:

> He promised to buy me a bunch of blue riband
> To tie up my bonny brown hair.

And that was all about the blue ribbon Daisy could then extract from him.

CHAPTER XV.

> For men, my love, still talk of higher themes,
> Of war and policy, of Church and State;
> And do not like your silly gossips' prate,
> Of: Who wears this——: Who's older than she seems.
>
> Oh no, we never mention her,
> Her name is never heard.

In the last chapter we saw the opinion of the Marstown young ladies upon Mrs. Brandiston-Browne's coming ball; and on Marstown society generally; especially the garrison element.

Now, would it not be almost more instructive to flit down invisibly to the Marstown barracks, and hear the opinion of some of the officers there upon these young ladies.

That same evening, Jack Dimity, and the still indefatigable Smiler Lee, were paying a visit to Captain Gascoigne in the latter's barrack-room.

It was a dull enough room when you took your first glance, yet at the second it was rather pleasant, and at last

grew upon one. It boasted no flowers in the window, nor china plates painted by the owner and hung on the wall among whips and photographs—like that of Smiler Lee. Nor again was it adorned with gaudy sporting prints in glorious confusion, as if all the young sub-lieutenants had been making hay therein—like Jack Dimity's den. It was severely simple in its furnishing; almost dainty in its neatness.

Two easy-chairs and a sofa seemed to mark the limits to which the host meant to stretch hospitality; but they were supposed to be more comfortable than those of anyone else.

A few books were carefully arranged; bad backs, but best of authors. Two small prints only were on the walls; but proofs before the letter.

The room faced the north, and might be gloomy in winter except for fire-glow. Now in June it was cool and shadowed. A dull red shade in curtains, in chintz coverings, and in the square of Eastern carpet in the middle of the dark-stained boards, gave a grateful warmth of tone. Still it was inartistic, according to Lee; whose latest hobby was preaching the delicacy of daffodil shades blended with chocolate in a bas-relief of frogs and flowers on a wall of dead gold, in an "indescribable" (as he described it) "Arabian Nights kind of sort of idea."

"Real high art, you know," he said, now leaning his back gracefully against the plain red velvet chimney-board, that bore no knick-knacks but a few really useful articles, such as the neatest kind of match-boxes or pipe-stands. He kept waving his cigar, as he taught the others, in a didactic, yet airy manner.

"Real high art! I wish you would tell us what high art really is," said the host, lazily and sarcastically, from his chair-depths. They were all smoking, and the room was redolent of many such past pleasant smokes. "One hears nothing but high art talked of by all the Marstown young ladies. Some of them showed me the other day a whole service of honest kitchen delf (as I should call it), hung at every imaginable different height round their untidy drawing-room, making it still more hideous; and that was high art, they said. And at the last ball most of the girls seemed to me frightfully badly dressed, with no petticoats, and short, shabby, economical-looking gowns, like so many walking bolster-cases. One or two, I could almost swear, had on

their Sunday frocks, with the sleeves ripped out and their arms showing instead; but still they all informed me (without any inquiries on my part) that their dresses were high art!' High art apparently meant plenty of bare arm to the shoulder, dancing in mittens to save gloves, and wearing lots of cheap silver bangles." The speaker roused himself to deliver this sweeping, unusual censure on his part with unusual animation.

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed the Smiler, artfully counterfeiting even more mirth than he felt at this outburst. (He was frightfully afraid of being pressed to explain his artistic ideas; having a lurking suspicion that his friend knew more on the matter then he did, and therefore anxious to lure Gascoigne to other high themes.) "Why, I did not imagine you would know what dress any girl had on. And you never seem to even look at any of them here. You never go anywhere that you could see them."

"Oh yes, I do," meditatively asserted Gascoigne, lapsing into his dreamy cigar-mood again. "I went to one ball, and looked on at the door for some time—that was quite enough for me. And I have seen them by day too! I was at the band yesterday," with an air of making the most of that experience of Marstown gaieties; so that no one need accuse him of not having fairly tried them first, like an upright gentleman.

"But they really are the vilest-dressed girls here!" renewed Lee, as if his sense of the beautiful was so excruciated he must exhaust his denunciations. "Only, poor things, they are so badly off. I declare it would be a capital thing to give one or two of them a new dress for our ball, eh? Really I have half a mind to do it—make the room look so much better, too!"

"If they can't afford to go out much, why should they go out?" said Gascoigne, rather severely for such a kindly-hearted man. "I have known very poor girls who had to dress on next to nothing; but I respected their makeshifts, because they never told me it was high art. And when they could not afford to go out, they stayed at home."

"All I ask is, that they should be cleanly and pretty tidy," put in Jack. "But the Smeeths, I declare, were simply coming to pieces at the last tennis party here in barracks. I was thinking of getting a needle and thread myself and sewing their flounces on for them."

"I declare I might spare them some of my red silk handkerchiefs to wear as new toques or turbans; theirs are so horribly old. They have only one apiece, they have worn since last winter," took up the Smiler, with gay impertinence.

"Yes, indeed. I think, I might also give them a round hat or two, and an ulster coat, out of my own wardrobe. Girls flatter us so by imitation nowadays," chimed in Jack; and so they went on in most harmonious antiphony. Gascoigne only, having delivered himself of all the spleen that was in him, said never a word more; but listened amusedly to the other two.

Whenever the talk approached the subject of the Coxes, however, young Dimity was silent; because he felt that having, on impulse, acceded to their skilfully-made request that his sister should come and stay with them, he had forfeited the right of discussing them.

And he liked them—after a fashion.

Still he felt uneasy, lest Daisy should be confounded with them, and talked about as he had done of the Marstown girls.

The others guessed something of this perhaps. At least, Gascoigne said, in his slow way, that might be either dubiousness or deliberation, and with a questioning tone:

"The Coxes seem to be much better dressed than the other girls here, though; don't they? And they seem to have better style, too; and be altogether nice people."

Young Lee looked at his somewhat older friend with a moment's *naïf* surprise. But as Gascoigne's facial muscles remained immovable, and betrayed no shade of secret satire, his really simple-hearted junior—who could be led by a silk thread by everyone he liked, and who was good-nature's very essence—warmly assented.

Only Jack—who, though so much younger again than the Smiler, had more acumen and an uncommonly large allowance of common sense—growled.

At that Gascoigne did smile faintly to himself. He liked Jack. Jack's growls amused him. He liked studying characters, in a kindly way, in his own mind, and young Dimity's moods repaid him; whilst Lee was as easy to scan as a child's A B C picture-book.

"Are you going to the Brandiston-Browne's ball?" asked the former young fellow now abruptly of the others, to change the subject.

"Of course."

"Certainly not."

"You regular old misanthrope!" exclaimed Lee, turning at that last to Gascoigne. "Why not, eh? You are surely not going to give up going out?"

"Who on earth are the Brandiston-Brownes?" was all Gascoigne made by way of answer. "I don't much care for Marstown society in any way; it is no better, and rather worse than most garrison towns. Still, Mrs. B.-B. struck me as one of the most appalling females in the whole place. She brought out the Peerage the one only day she got me calling there, and the page showing me first cousin to a lord was doubled down. 'You see,' she said, 'we know all about you; we know all about your connections!'"

At which remembrance the speaker knocked off his cigar-ash with such a disgusted look that the other two loudly laughed.

"Well, she handed me 'Burke's Landed Gentry,' and asked me to show her all about myself," put in Lee. "But when she found I was only the younger son of a younger son, she dropped me like a hot potato for a week. By ill-luck somebody has gone and told her I have expectations from an old aunt; and my life has been positively a burden ever since. She and that terrible crane of a tall daughter have pressed me to go to lunch, dine, even breakfast, till—— Well, you know"—with a deprecatory ha! ha!—"I have generally helped myself out with some blarney; but even I am at my wits' end for excuses."

The others facetiously condoled with their comrade with mock pity.

"Ah! it's all very well to laugh, but she'll ask my intentions soon, I do believe," retorted poor Smiler, solemnly shaking his head. "She's an awful old woman! Do you know that little room near the hall? She sits in there, I'm told, and waylays the fellows before they go upstairs; so as to 'spare her dear girl's feelings.' Ugh! she did it to five men in the same regiment once. It was here some time before us, they say; so I'm in for it. Lots of fellows might funk it, but I'm rather keen for the excitement of the thing." With a lightsome smile playing over his darkly-stern resolve to meet the dame in terrible close combat, and win or die in the encounter.

"I am glad you like the idea of it," quoth Gascoigne,

with a dry smile; "but still, who are these people, Dimity? They give themselves such airs that I am curious on the subject."

"Well, old Brown's father was a big butcher, and afterwards mayor here; neither more nor less. He christened his eldest hopeful Brandiston, in compliment to the customers who bought his primest beef and mutton—an old county family here, since died out, or 'gone to the dogs.' This present Brown—'Old Brandynose,' as they call him—became a lawyer, and married an attorney's daughter (Smiler's future mother-in-law). So, to look fine, she adopted the name of Brandiston before the Brown, and tacked on an *e* after it."

"I see—affix and prefix. So now all the progeny will call themselves Brandiston-Brownes, *ad infinitum*, without any right. That sort of thing is done constantly nowadays," said Gascoigne, with the regretful tone of a stickler for old-fashioned honesty, if not for old quarterings.

"When any new regiments come here they are apt to imagine that these are some of the old Brandistons, now extinct," added Jack. "And Mrs. Browne rather fosters the delusion by observing that, though not related, they are, in a way, connected. . . . Well, I must be off now."

"Well, I wish you both a pleasant evening; and may neither of you marry, nor be given in marriage to Miss Brandiston-Browne," returned Gascoigne, turning a hankering eye already on the *Revue des Deux Mondes* lying open near him.

"Marriage! I believe the Marstown young women think of nothing on this earth else than of how to get married," uttered Jack, like a young St. Kevin, as he took himself off.

"But they are not very likely to catch any of us," called back the Smiler, with a gay vainglory dating from having come off unscarred after several campaigns in similar stations.

He loved, indeed, as he phrased it, going out on the war-path.

CHAPTER XVI.

He saw a cottage with a double coach-house,
A cottage of gentility;
And the devil was pleased, for his darling vice
Is the pride that apes humility.

Before going to the dance, a second great passage of arms (fought, however, with much silence) took place in the Cox family.

The question was, how should they all go; since the doctor's tiny brougham was truly hardly capable of holding three—yet they were five ladies. It had been resolved by the sisters that one of the officers' wives, Mrs. Luxton, a merry, pretty young woman, should be asked to take one of them. To this (Mrs. Cox having made the request, as instructed by her daughters, with her utmost elegance of manner) Mrs. Luxton readily assented; glad enough thereby to repay many little hospitalities, teas and luncheons, that had been pressed upon her by the Coxes.

The next question was, who should go?

All three were eager. It was a keen point of rivalry between the sisters, which was the most intimate friend of Mrs. Luxton.

But Birdie, as usual, carried the day.

With assurance she declared that she had been specially asked. The rest, surprised, could only wonder that nothing had been known of this before. Birdie, indignant, wished to ask did they doubt her truth? She did not care to go; but she would not have her word questioned. In fact (with tears), nothing would now induce her to go; anyone else might that chose. Of course no one else now would; and, in the end, the young lady allowed herself to be persuaded to accept the coveted position.

Mrs. Brandiston-Browne's was a very tiny house; the family means not having swelled with the family name. Her guests, as we know, were considered few—she being so very select.

Still they seemed to throng the stairs, on which no two people had room to pass; they overflowed into the lady's bed-room, set apart as a cloak-room for lady guests; they trickled into what was called a boudoir close by, but that was obviously the dressing-room of Mr. Brandiston-Browne; they surged into a den below stairs termed the study, where

gentlemen's hats were piled in darkness and disarray; they crowded the tea-room that was (painfully evidently) the guest's bed-room; they were already half exuding into the street, it seemed—as, after the first few dances, they sat for coolness and space on the window-sills.

Daisy, all in white and tremors, with pink sashes and blushes, followed Mrs. Cox and her two eldest daughters down from the cloak-room, and struggled against the up-stream of guests valiantly. Jack met them at the foot of the stairs, with the cares of a chaperon making deep furrows on his boyish brow.

"Look here, little one, I'll come to you between every dance; for as it's your first one, I must look after you, you know," he murmured, ignoring apparently Mrs. Cox's maternal cares. "And if nobody else asks you, you'd better dance with me, for it doesn't do to be sitting."

"Oh! thank you, Jack dear. Has—has Captain Gascoigne come to-night?"

"He? No; he has more sense."

Daisy's relief was so great, it was rather akin to regret—a peculiar feeling; but so she explained it to herself.

Mrs. Browne was in the hall, or rather—the entry.

They had already passed hooded and cloaked under her very nose, but both hostess and guests, respecting social humbug, had discreetly ignored each other.

Now she welcomed them duly, in a voice as ear-splitting as a peacock's scream.

She was a little woman with a face like parchment; dressed in a snuff-coloured silk gown, with an old-fashioned pendant like two gilded vipers coiling round a garnet, slung on a harsh, black velvet-ribbon round her wrinkled throat. She received Daisy with excruciating intensity of friendliness in her tone; pressed her hand; and at once "presented" her to a row of feather-bed mothers all dressed in black silk gowns cut heart-shaped, many gold chains, and red-flowered caps, as—"Miss Dimity, of Elm Hall, Royalshire, you know."

The stout ladies all preened themselves, as it were; and looked at Daisy as if, after due time, they might find breath to remark that she was quite an equal. Daisy looked at them, and wondered what on earth she ought to say to them.

But, at that moment, she found herself forcibly taken possession of and carried away by the Smiler, who had the air of a gay young buccaneer.

"The first dance is half over. Fancy your being so late; and I have been waiting for you all this time, you naughty little lady! . . . Why, of course I was not going to have the first dance with anyone but yourself."

As he bore her away, they could hear Mrs. Browne expatiating to her friends, "Yes, a charming girl, Miss Dimity; so glad to have her at my little dance. Very old family, you know; established at Elm Hall before the Normans; her father is the member there——"

"He's not!" Daisy exclaimed, with some concern, checking her partner's struggling progress.

She did not quite like to add also that the Dimitys were much, much later at Elm Hall than the time of the Doomsday-book.

"Mrs. Browne is quite under a misconception about papa's being a member. Perhaps I ought to go back and tell her it is a mistake."

At this Mr. Lee laughed so immoderately, he could hardly compose himself enough to say, in dissuasion:

"Not for worlds! She loves to make our fortunes and pedigrees for all of us. We'll go back after this turn, and listen to her at it with somebody else."

It was gliding, it was flying, it was skating to music to dance with the Smiler.

Daisy thought so, after a long, long round, as she panted as much from pleasure as breathlessness.

"You went very nicely—very nicely indeed," said her partner patronisingly. "Let me tell you what, Miss Dimity: if only you had a little more practice—(you don't mind me saying that, do you? No, sensible girl!)—if you only had a little good practice, and some hints, you would be a CLIPPER."

The future clipper humbly expressed gratified delight, and anxiety to adopt all Mr. Lee's kind hints.

"You see, I have never danced with a real gentleman before—that is to say with a real man—only with Polly. I forgot you don't know her; she is my sister. We used to try round and round on the school-room carpet; that was pretty well worn, but still it was hard work. But indeed, Mr. Lee (beseechingly) if you would teach me a little I should be so glad."

"Teach you! Of course, Dimity's sister. Why, you belong to the regiment. Trouble! don't speak of it," with

flattered satisfaction. "But if I may be your teacher (ho, ho, ho! excuse my laughing, but you do look such a charming pupil in that pretty frock!) I must have four—six—come, seven or eight dances to-night. There, I'll write them on my shirt-cuff; you'll remember them?"

"Never," uttered Daisy, with parted lips and intense lugubriousness. "Never. I have no memory at all, and Jack has just introduced me to two friends of his in your regiment, and said I must not forget their dances on any account. Oh, you need not ask; I can't tell their names. They are thin, tall boys, with drab faces and tow-coloured hair."

The Smiler screamed with delight at this description of his young sub-lieutenants; and at Daisy's distraction.

"I'll tell you what: I shall write down your engagements, too, if you like, on my other cuff, and then you can always come and ask me," he said, in confidentially paternal tones. "No thanks. Why, Dimity's sister must be looked after. But, I say, tell me whom you heard talk of my dancing; come, do just tell me! Pure curiosity, you know. I don't care what people say about me."

His countenance slightly fell, however, as Daisy truthfully assured him her opinion was only based on her personal experience.

At this moment the "handsomest man in the British Army" stopped them, as he lounged languidly in the doorway. He murmured a request for a waltz, too.

"Your first dance this, isn't it, Miss Dimity? How very refreshing!"

"And I can tell you what, O'Donoghue," impressively whispered the Smiler, in a tone meant to be perfectly audible to Daisy. "With a very little more practice she'll beat all these other girls hollow. So light! Only a little practice, and she'll be a CLIPPER!"

"Do you know, Miss Dimity, that Mr. Lee is considered the best dancer in the British Army?" asked Captain O'Donoghue, in an equally impressive aside to Daisy, with a gentle smile. He was used to having such confidences imparted by his friend, predicting that every fresh ball-room favourite would be a "clipper;" and he never failed to play his part in return. "Do you know that many young ladies would give a good deal to have their step as much praised by him?"

Little Miss Dimity was hereupon led away by the laughing, protesting Best Dancer; being so overpowered at his infinite condescension in engaging her for so many fast dances she was inclined to beg him not thus to sacrifice himself.

With much difficulty they found two seats, and now began to look around them.

The rooms in which dancing had been going on were connected by folding-doors; being plainly, in their ordinary state, drawing and dining rooms. They were small, ill-lit, and stiflingly hot; but it was a breezy night, and whenever a window was opened the wind caused wax-candles to come guttering down on everyone's coat, till the suppressed execrations of the gentlemen must have made the heart of each a small pandemonium.

As to decorations, a pair of shrunken, washed muslin curtains were looped untidily between the two mean little apartments; and in the centre of these was suspended an earthen flower-pot, containing a small plant—genus unknown. The exquisiteness of this floral adornment, and Daisy's indignation at the pot not having been well cleaned, tickled the Smiler's fancy so much that he proposed a voyage of discovery round the rest of the family band-box mansion.

"Why did Captain Gascoigne not come to-night?" little Miss Dimity now ventured to inquire of the easy-going Smiler, although surely having learnt his absence from Jack might have been sufficient.

"Why? Oh! because there was no one here he cared to dance with, evidently," in a careless tone. (Miss Dimity mused at that: yet the person in question had cared to go to the band yesterday.)

In the doorway, as they tried to pass out, Mrs. Browne was still welcoming a small, inflowing stream of ladies with the voice of a macaw; or peering with an anxious eye to see what gentleman she could swoop on to be introduced—for introducing young men and maidens was her weak point, her (perhaps amiable) cacoethes.

Not a marriage had taken place in her set for years, but she would say with pride: "I introduced them."

Now, she absolutely dropped, hawk-like, on young Dimity, who had made a bold effort to get past unscathed.

"Stop, stop, Mr. Dimity; let me introduce you to my girl. You don't know her, I think. She was dancing when

you came in. She is so run after for her dancing—though I should not say so. My love, have you kept a dance you could give Mr. Dimity?"

Thus Jack was ruefully "nailed" to dance with this faded Terpsichore, who was like a thin crane, and seemed to stand on one leg; also, as she had a pale prominent nose, and carried her head pensively downcast she seemed, like that bird, to be seeking food (for meditation, or otherwise) in the ground evermore.

Mrs. Browne could next be distinctly heard uttering, in bland explanation to the black-silken-robed, stout sisterhood:

"A young man of such charming manners, Mr. Dimity is; heir to a very fine country estate, and a deer-park."

At this Daisy tittered, thereby spoiling the Smiler's insinuating endeavour to slip behind his hostess's back; for, with the hearing of a lynx, she turned, smiling.

"Ah! little Miss Dimity!" she exclaimed, with that petting air everyone generally would adopt towards that small damsel, to the occasional offence of her dignity.

"Oh! let me introduce you! Mr. Higginbotham."

There was a very round-shouldered young man standing near, with watery eyes, red nose, and a corpulent person. The word "lout" alone describes the impression his mere sight produced; and the Smiler, perceiving his partner shudder, would have made a gallant dash for freedom, but that Mrs. Brandiston-Browne had laid a skinny claw upon Daisy's arm, and held her fast.

"My dear, don't mind his looks; he's a *bon parti!* Will have two thousand a year of his very own, and only two lives between him and a baronetcy!" she explained loudly in Daisy's ear, making her shudder; and giving her an encouraging little push in the back, so that she nearly went into the future baronet's arms.

The young man's eyes watered over Daisy. He produced a little china-edged slate from his pocket, breathed on it, rubbed it with his cuff. Then, as she murmured, dismayed: "The—the tenth dance" in answer to a request that seemed gasped out as if he were smothering in a feather-bed, he, as it were, smacked his lips, announcing:

"I'll come and look for you. I'll be sure to find you."

When they escaped, Jack confronted them in the hall.

"Did she introduce you to that brute, Daisy? I won't have you dance with him; get out of it as you like."

"Oh, but, Jack dear, what am I to do? He is dreadful! But you told me no lady ought ever to throw anyone over for a dance."

"Don't mind," laughed Smiler Lee; "for you've been and gone and given the poor fellow one of my dances, so I'll come up and declare you promised it to me." (A great big fib on his part: that made dance number eight he had claimed, as Daisy, with a sort of horrified pleasure, suspected, but had no courage, if she had will to protest.)

"Of course, no lady ought ever to throw a gentleman over. You must not throw any of our fellows over," said young Rhadamanthus, with grandiose severity, and a brotherly eye. "But that cad is very different, and, if he attempts to dance with you, I'll have to drag you away from him."

"Jack, dear, I'm afraid Mrs. Browne made a mistake about your charming manners," roguishly exclaimed his sister, and, leaving him to growl, she and Lee gaily danced off to inspect the premises.

They could get no further than the dressing-room boudoir, however; where Mr. Browne's boots, protruding from under a sofa, were the only available articles of furniture on which couples were not sitting.

Likewise, there was a sofa on the landing, discreetly veiled with washed and worn muslin curtains, and lighted by an evil-smelling Chinese lantern.

The Smiler plunged down rather too ecstatically on this resting-place, when, to his horror, it sank immediately on one back-leg beneath him, and he and Daisy seemed playing see-saw.

Stifled mirth was heard on the stairs, and Major Hodge's burly form, with Fuzzy Cox peeping behind him, appeared, having been hid by the curtains.

"We broke that some time ago, and we're watching to see how many more couples will go down on it," they explained.

"But I say, Hodge, is there no other place to sit?" uttered the poor Smiler, lamentably. "Miss Dimity and I here have been dancing like anything for the last two valses, but we can't get a simple stool to rest on, nor a penny-piece of room even to stand."

"Not a spot; it's only a two-storeyed house, and we very nearly found ourselves pushed out on the slates with the rowd up there."

"And we've been searching downstairs, and the kitchen is the only spot not thrown open," lowed Mr. Jones, with his deep voice, looking more bovine than ever, coming up with Pussy on his arm. Jack and Birdie now eagerly joined the friendly conclave, the first asking:

"Where d'ye think the furniture is all stored? How they'll sleep to-night is a mystery." The maiden chimed in:

"Isn't it a shame? They have locked the tea-room door, so that we can't get any more refreshments till supper-time. And isn't it hot?"

"Hot—I believe you!" uttered the "best dancer" in the British Army, fanning himself with his handkerchief. "I'll tell you all what, I must have something to drink. So let us all meet after each dance, and fairly besiege that supper-room."

So said, so done. After each succeeding dance the same thirsty coterie were in the van of the disappointed crowd who rushed to the closed door.

Locked! Locked still!

"I declare," vowed Jack, "if the old woman doesn't open it soon, we'll all go to the pump round the corner."

By this time the Smiler, who so loved dancing he could hardly stop any more than the famous man with the cork leg—which when wound up never could leave off going—was hotter and thirstier than ever.

Jack was growling thunders, heedless that Mrs. Browne was still "introducing" her dear young friends with macaw screeches a few feet away.

Daisy had had her feet pounded to a jelly by the drab-faced sub-lieutenants who came for their dances with terrible promptitude (Jack had stood by her to see all right). She had, for some wicked moments, wished to dance on their feet also, in revenge; but dismissed the base thought, because they were in "Jack's regiment." So, after dolorously struggling to get as few kicks from them and bumps from others as possible, she was rewarded by each informing her, her step suited him better than that of any other girl he knew; and that each hoped to have several such turns with her at *their ball.*

At which Miss Dimity's heart sank like lead to her shoes: while the Smiler shrieked with unholy mirth, when she secretly confided this to him.

It was tempting, on this night of her first dance, to tell some one what she thought of it all. And it was disappointingly impossible to tell Jack. For though he came up with gruff punctuality between each dance to say, "Well, little one, how are you getting on?" yet Birdie Cox seemed always on his arm, invariably adding, "Yes, dear little thing; how are you getting on?" Which became tiresome.

Also, Captain O'Donoghue had led her forth to dance, and, with all his languor, startled her by starting with his arm round her waist in such a vice-like grip that she soon felt each turn torture, and made agonised struggles for relief. But round went the "handsomest man in the Army," blandly smiling as he waltzed, whilst the worse his victim danced the tighter and tighter he caught her, idiotically believing that this must mend matters.

When at last they stopped, Daisy felt squeezed to a votary of Juggernaut; her dainty shoulder-knots crushed, and her feelings lacerated. But her partner, caressing his moustache, only remarked:

"We didn't—aw—quite hit it off that time, eh? Never mind. A little more practice, and you may get into my step. (Into his horrible clutch, thought Daisy, trusting fervently not.) I'm used—ah!—to trying all the new girls for our fellows."

Daisy could have cried; and she was sure it was all his fault. She was ashamed to ask him not to hold her so tight in future; besides, plainly he thought his manner of grip and style of step must be considered a treat by the fortunate damsels he honoured. Feeling that with her it was "Mene, mene, tekel upharsin," and that the rest of Captain O'Donoghue's "fellows" would be told she was weighed in the balance and found wanting, our heroine looked quite ruefully-minded when the Smiler again claimed her for about his sixth dance.

The room had grown hotter, the wind outside wilder, the coats waxier—like their owners, to speak school-boy fashion. The chalk had risen in impalpable clouds, paving all throats with a new proof that we live in the chalk age, geologically speaking.

Even the Smiler was fast losing the clearness of his laugh and the crispness of his moustaches.

Still his swing went on smoothly as ever in the dance. Still Daisy was charmed with him; as how, indeed, could

she be otherwise? Then the little man was so gay, so flattering, so consoling.

"Don't mind O'Donoghue; he's so horribly conceited about his step. Now mine is the real *trois-temps*. But so many men will imagine their step is the only right one. Look at Hodge now—doing the Southsea Fling."

In truth, that warrior now slowly and heavily circled past them with Fuzzy Cox; his big hand, in a bigger, wrinkled glove, being placed like a spread-eagle so high upon that young lady's back that it rested, in fact, on her shoulders.

Mr. Lee was so diverted by the appearance of this, that he cried: "Ho, ho, ho!" and twisted up his moustaches tight; till Daisy was afraid the couple in question would be incensed. As they stopped he darted forward and whispered:

"Miss Cox—ho, ho! excuse my laughing, won't you?—but how do you like the way my friend Hodge places his hand?"

"It's awfully delicious," cordially responded that young lady, nodding back at him familiarly, and giving a retrospective delighted shiver at the recollection. "It feels so like a nice blister on my back."

If the Smiler had laughed in his sleeve before, he now was fairly doubled up with delight, as he thought of retailing this little tale after mess; and he twisted up his moustaches so much tighter than ever that he seemed as if, in ecstatic agonies, he wanted to point the story with them.

The sudden opening of the long-watched supper-room door recalled him to his senses, and he flew—carrying off Daisy—to be in at the feast, together with the rest of their already sworn band.

CHAPTER XVII.

He's but a coof for a' that.

Blank disappointment!

On Mrs. Brandiston-Browne's supper-table were arranged, with praiseworthy symmetry, a few dishes of sandwiches and some glass jugs of suspicious-looking champagne-cup; nothing more.

Two or three of the hungry guests tried a sandwich, and gave a simultaneous ugh! These were fiendish secretions of potted red herring!

Nobody could finish theirs; and Mrs. Browne's peacock screech could be heard coming nearer and nearer. With the rapidity of despair Lee popped his under the table, an example followed by the other gentlemen; whilst Jack Dimity and some others, devoured with thirst, tried the cup.

Sour cider, with apple slices bobbing therein by way of cucumber! The faces that now looked at each other outdid the bitterness of the cup—rivalled the salt sharpness of the potted herring.

"Is there nothing else but this poison?" sighed Jack Dimity. "By Jove——"

All the friendly leaguers' eyes followed the direction of his, and spied a little infinitesimal table behind the door.

On this a solitary decanter of sherry had been holding sway. But now it was in the grasp of Mr. Higginbotham, who held it tight in one hand, with the eager clutch of a discoverer; while, from the expression of his countenance, the wine-glass in his other hand had been well used several times already, and was intended still to be brimmed by this votary of Bacchus.

A murmur passed among the conspirators that this was Daisy's pet partner, and the man whom Mrs. Browne had eulogised as a squire of high degree, a country gentleman, a young man of independent fortune.

"Such a treasure!" she had been overheard to whisper. "Such a blessing! when there are only military men in Marstown, and they are generally not—well, not in affluent circumstances, you know."

The young men of the friendly league, red-coats all (except that they were now in mufti) had received Mrs. Browne's overheard strictures on their financial position in some dudgeon, or with satirical glee.

Now, beholding her "treasure" in such a dubious position, they drew near to draw meek comparisons betwixt their rough soldier selves and Mrs. Browne's "Blessing," as they termed him.

Even Daisy, who was much more shy than the Cox girls, could not help heartily laughing as their respective partners condoled with one another upon not being in such "affluent circumstances" as Mr. Higginbotham.

"Wears worsted stockings, you perceive," enviously remarked the light-spoken Smiler. "Only a rich man can afford 'ress badly. That is a matter of common notoriety."

"Has absolutely a place of his own in the country; where, I should think, he has been brought up all his days, and would have done better never to leave it," was Jack's deeper-voiced comment.

"But the most notorious joke of all is the fellow's ball-tablets," ended Major Hodge, with a fat chuckle.

As if he had become aware of being observed, Mr. Higginbotham now looked round; upon which Daisy's face seemed to rouse some obscured memory in his dazed brain. Slowly he drew out the china-edged little slate—a very common one it was—mechanically breathed thereon, rubbed it with his coat-cuff by the mere force of habit—plainly.

For then, still eyeing Daisy and relinquishing his hold of the decanter, he slowly approached her.

Breathless silence fell upon the group of the friendly alliance. Basely hoping for some fun, they waited; whilst, with a more smothered utterance than ever, the young man —within two lives of the baronetcy—was understood to remind Miss Dimity that she had promised him a dance.

A tremor for poor Daisy ran through the coalition.

"Come away!" sepulchrally growled Jack, offering his arm.

But with amazing presence of mind, the little lady, standing her ground, calmly inquired of her would-be partner:

"Have you got it written down?"

The unhappy young man had just rubbed it out—a fact of which he seemed unaware.

With a face of confusion he consulted the blank slate, and its now undecipherable blurs, then gazed at Daisy.

"As you do not seem to know what dance it was, we had better say no more about it. I am engaged for the rest of the evening," said she, and sailed away with great dignity.

All followed her with suppressed applause; except Mrs. Browne's "Blessing," who was still holding up his pocket-slate to the light with ever-increasing confusion of mind.

On subsequent occasions during the evening, Jack and the Smiler, who took deep interest in Mr. Higginbotham, returned. They reported him to the disgusted Daisy as having sought consolation in the fresh, single decanter of sherry that was next served out; and as still mechanically breathing on his slate and wiping it.

On went the night. It was strange to Daisy, however, that, do as she would, she could never shake off the feeling

that she was in second-rate society; that she was almost sorry and ashamed for their yellow-visaged little hostess with her stinginess, poverty that made ridiculous pretences, and unfounded claims to gentility.

"How do you like it?" Major Hodge asked of her. And, as she hesitatingly replied that she had perhaps expected too much, was unused to dances, but loved dancing, Jack and Mr. Lee, who stood by, both broke in:

"Remember, you are not coming out at this affair. Mind you tell everyone, you are only coming out at our ball!"

"It is a twopenny-halfpenny entertainment, certainly," deprecatingly remarked the burly major. "But what better can you expect in a garrison town, Miss Dimity, eh? I own I take my fun out of this sort of society; because on principle I try to do so wherever one may be sent to. But confess now that you, who are used to a different sort of thing, have seen and heard some eye-openers since you came."

But to him Daisy was not going to acknowledge anything of the sort. Was she likely to decry Marstown society and girls to a man who was paying so much attention to Fuzzy Cox; the kindest daughter of the people who had so good-naturedly housed her for Jack's ball? Certainly not!

"Where is Miss Birdie to be found, I wonder? By-the-way, I've never given her a turn to-night. Daresay she's with your brother, though, very happy—what do you think?" went on the major, staring at Daisy with a peculiar smile.

"Really I have no idea. Perhaps, since Mrs. Luxton is her chaperon to-night, it would be better to ask her."

"Ah! capital; so it would," and, with a provoking desire to torment Miss Daisy Dimity—whose innocent trust in Jack and dignified respect for her companions, the Coxes, refused to be ruffled—Major Hodge turned quickly to Mrs. Luxton.

"Do I know where the youngest Miss Cox is? Indeed, I do not," replied that young woman, with laughing indignation, to his insinuating query. "Her chaperon? Yes; the girl asked me to let her come into the room behind me; it is a way these Marstown girls have. But, then, they never come near one afterwards during the whole evening, and would be very sorry if I were to go after them. All they want is the mere pretence of the thing!"

She stopped abruptly, as her interlocutor made a warn-

ing sign. Not having perceived Daisy close by till now, she did not know even then who she was, till Major Hodge whispered to her—she seemed much taken aback, and promised him a sound scolding by a look. For Jack was in the same regiment as her husband, and was, besides, a favourite of hers.

"You look quite surprised, Miss Dimity?" teasingly observed Major Hodge, on his return. "Was that an eye-opener? Come, you may as well own to it; do."

With more than even usual delight, his mental victim hailed Jack, who at this moment made one of his frequent dives after her. No one could say she was not well guarded, at any rate; since it was one of the jokes of the evening to see how the young sister was carefully looked after by the brother, who was only two or three years older than herself.

"Well," said young Cerberus, with an affectionate glance that to outsiders might falsely seem disparaging, "what do you want to bother me about now?"

"As if you thought it really a bother! Jack dear, Mr. Lee has been asking me to go out riding to-morrow, if you will come to take care of me. And—I should like it so much. He says Galloper Down is so delightful for a canter."

"I daresay (witheringly); but what kind of animals do you both propose to canter—two donkeys?"

"Oh, Jack! He says I can get a horse to hire, and he will get one for himself too. He knows of a beauty for me—a mare, that goes like a lamb."

"He—he doesn't know a horse from a cow! Well, don't look so doleful, child. I must trust him to choose you a mount; for, worse luck, all to-morrow morning I'm on duty. But I'll come to take you, never fear."

Then, turning away, he came back again; asking, rather awkwardly:

"By-the-way, though, Daisy, you are not going to dance this next with Lee, are you? Oh, you are! Because, you see, it's not quite the thing—it doesn't do—I mean, aren't you dancing rather too often with him?"

"Oh, Jack dear!" and Daisy's face showed a dawning of great concern, but was changed after a moment's reflection to one of innocent triumph. "Why, no; you must be wrong. For I counted how many times *you* have danced with Birdie Cox, and it is two more dances still." Jack had not a word

to say at that. "I am all right so long as I do only what you do, am I not?" continued his young sister, unconsciously pursuing her victory. "And, besides, Mr. Lee is teaching me how to dance; and he is your great friend he says."

"Captain Gascoigne is my greatest friend," moodily murmured her brother. And he turned away, with some reluctance, to claim the youngest Miss Cox for the next dance, which she had already promised him.

When it was ended Mrs. Cox came up rather hastily to Daisy.

"I am afraid I really must take you away now, you dissipated child. It is dreadfully late, but I had not the heart to take you away when I saw (flatteringly to the young man) you were dancing with Mr. Lee."

Daisy broke out in honest regrets that Mrs. Cox should have stayed on her account.

"Oh, it does not signify, indeed; and certainly Mr. Lee is a very good dancer. (This was said in an aside tone, less flatteringly, as if the Smiler's other attributes were just a *leet*le less excellent.) Well, I know you have been enjoying yourself, because I have never seen you all the evening."

Since Mrs. Cox had herself rather tried to evade the unusual burden of "looking after" her charge, and had been daintily and busily winning sixpences at whist with three retired generals, this was hardly surprising.

But now, waiving excuses, she begged Lee to find her carriage; despatched him to bring her cloak; leant on his arm, taking it as a matter of course, as she hurried her little party outside.

And yet Major Hodge and Mr. Jones were there with her own daughters, but she did not impound their services. Daisy never remarked this. She only said:

"I wish I had seen Jack, to say good-night to him."

The little party in the brougham reached home rather sleepy, in spite of all the remarks they had to make. A very sleepy maid opened the door, and lit their candles.

"Where is Miss Birdie?" asked the weary mother.

"Not come home yet, ma'am."

"Not come home! Why, Mrs. Luxton left two dances ago. Is it possible she can have forgotten? How extraordinary!"

"I head Mrs. Luxton asking her 'was she coming?' and she answered 'No,'" broke in Daisy. "She was dancing with Jack, my brother."

"So like Birdie—careless, forgetful, inconsiderate," murmured the anxious mother.

All faces gazed blankly at each other.

"We were almost the last. There was no one left, coming from this side of the town, but the officers. I declare, it serves her right," uttered Pussy, who seemed in a sleepy, soured mood. But Fuzzy and Daisy both thought of consolation.

"Dear Mrs. Cox, it was not her fault, you may be sure. And Jack was with her; he always makes everything right."

"Yes; don't bother, mamma. Be grateful for all blessings; and it is a real blessing she was left with Dim—with Mr. Dimity."

"Certainly, there is *no* young man with whom I would as soon trust my girl," said Mrs. Cox impressively, transfixing Jack's sister with her gaze.

As they all thus stood, huddled up in their wraps, shivering, anxious, the brougham gone, not a cab to be had, a rattle of wheels in the silent street aroused, then relieved them; and out jumped Miss Birdie from a hansom.

"What was the matter? Well, I was left behind between you all!" she coolly replied, in answer to the outbursting flood of queries. "Mr. Dimity and I had gone upstairs to sit in the boudoir after the last dance. (Give me another glass of wine, mamma.) Well, it grew very quiet in the house—nice and still. At last he got uneasy, and said the next dance ought to be beginning. So down we went, and what do you think? Everyone was gone but the fiddlers; and there were Mrs. and Miss Browne going round blowing out the candles. You should have seen their faces and Mr. Dimity's look—he! he! he!"

Daisy, for one, could imagine that Jack's look had been well worth the seeing; and that he would growl to himself like condensed thunder, at having been found in such a false position.

"But why did he not come back with you?" cried the sisters.

"He would not hear of it," replied Birdie, carelessly; but with secret chagrin. "Mrs. Browne is such a scandal-monger, perhaps it was just as well. He had to run half-a-mile to get me this cab, as it was. Then he put me in, paid the driver, and walked off alone to the barracks. So she can't say a word! Good-night. I am so sleepy." And

carelessly yawning widely at the rest, Miss Birdie nevertheless remembered her manners so much as to honour their guest with a sudden hug and a gushing kiss on either cheek.

"It was very unfortunate, but still—" murmured Mrs. Cox, as if meditating aloud, and again softly transfixing Daisy with her impressive gaze—"but still, though there are very few other young men I could trust alone in such a position with one of my girls, I know that your brother is worthy of the highest confidence. There is no young man, as I said before, my dear, with whom I would allow one of my girls to go without a chaperon, as I would with him."

Really!

Even whilst murmuring due acknowledgment of her brother's praises, Daisy thought at once (she could not help it!) of Major Hodge and Mr. Jones; and that if Jack were to dispense more with a chaperon than either of those two gentlemen did, when in the society of the Misses Cox, he might go very far indeed.

And why was it that such unlimited trust and such meaning confidence were to be reposed in Jack—why so?

In spite of making a very large allowance for the admiration and esteem that must of course be Jack's due—that naturally he would inspire all his acquaintances with—his adoring sister yet felt uneasy. Various trifles she had at the time thought insignificant, now recalled to memory, seemed important signs; straws showing how the wind blew. Yes, indeed; they were deeply important!

And thus, as Daisy laid her fresh cheek on the pillow after her first dance, it was with quite a feeling of solemn shock banishing the memory of all the light twirlings and whirlings of the evening. For she seemed—quite by accident—to have stumbled upon a secret; to have had her eyes extraordinarily sharpened to discover the outline of a—well, not a plot (that was an ugly word), but a plan—no, not a plan either, but an idea! that might, if carried out, most seriously affect in future both the squire and their stepmother, Polly, herself, and dear old Elm Hall.

For fully ten minutes, that seemed an hour, Daisy lay awake—wondering with very sleepy but infinitely anxious alarms and wisdom, all incoherently mingled, whether this idea was an idea altogether of her own creation; whether, if carried out, it would be for her dearest Jack's *happiness*.

The sagest, next thought was whether—on the whole—it would not be better just then to go to sleep, and do the rest of her thinking by the light of the coming morning. Upon which she immediately acted.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Die Rose, die Lilje, die Taube, die Sonne,
Die liebt' ich einst alle in Liebeswonne.
Ich lieb' sie nicht mehr, ich liebe alleine
Die Kleine, die Feine, die Reine, die Eine;
Sie selber, aller Liebe Bronne,
Ist Rose und Lilje und Taube und Sonne.

On the morning after her first dance, Daisy woke with difficulty to find Mrs. Cox's housemaid observing in her ear, with respect-breathing loudness:

"Breakfast at eleven o'clock, miss."

"Dear me, how nice!" ejaculated our slothful, small heroine; although, indeed, they had not been late the night before.

Then, finding she had ample time to dress, she got downstairs punctually for the belated meal.

Mrs. Cox was already down before her; but when Daisy, discovering this, exclaimed she felt ashamed of her own laziness, Mrs. Cox, as if fearing some slur might seem thrown on her own daughters by comparison, hastily answered, with an apologetic, tired smile:

"No, no, my dear; young people must enjoy themselves while they can. I—of course, I have been down since eight o'clock to see after the doctor and my little schoolboys. Things would never go right, if I did not . . . By-the-way, what nice gloves you wore last night! Do you mind telling me how much they cost?"

Daisy laughed, and told her they were rather dear (since Madame Furbelow scorned keeping inferior articles).

She fancied her hostess made a rapid mental calculation, as she very mildly inclined her head while filling the tea-cups, ejaculating: "Ah!" . . . But she little imagined that the troubled mother was thinking to herself: "Four-and-sixpence last night at cards, and the extra money must come out of the milk-bill. Yes, I must get Fuzzy a pair. Major Hodge remarked he did not like mittens worn at dances. I saw him looking at hers out of the corner of his eye."

"I am afraid that my girls will not be down for some time," she presently remarked. "They are getting later and later. I have been vainly upstairs three times already, begging the three of them to get out of bed. You put them to shame, my dear! You see, when we have only two maids (and an occasional help), it is hard to give several breakfasts."

Mrs. Cox, it will be seen, was growing intimate with Daisy; so much so that the poor soul laid aside many of her little pretences, and indulged in the relief of being at times honest.

She had hardly spoken before Birdie burst into the room, slamming the door behind her.

"Good morning!" she cried, with an utter ignoring of her mother's existence; although bestowing upon Daisy a sounding double kiss. "You see, I can be in time as well as you. Your brother bet me a sixpence I would not be down for breakfast; so you will tell him I am not the lazy one of our family, won't you? Mind you tell him now!"

Yes, certainly Birdie had come down to breakfast; but how? It would have been better if she had gone upstairs again.

Her touzled fringe of hair had plainly never been re-curled; without the semblance of having had a brush this morning, her yellow locks were twisted up tight, or, as Polly at Elm Hall called this style, *à la wash-tub* knot. An old serge gown seemed to have been hastily buttoned over a scarcity of garments, one button of which gown soon going off with a pop completed the disarray. Birdie, nothing daunted, replaced the lack with a pin; and went on healthily and hugely consuming bread and home-made blackberry jam, grumbling at her mother for being so stingy as not to give them marmalade.

Fuzzy came down when the meal was nearly ended. But then she was properly dressed; and though displeased in her turn that the maids could not make her fresh toast and boil an egg—since the one hard-worked being was gone to market and the other was busy making the beds upstairs; wisely refusing to hear the voice of the charmer—she speedily solaced herself with cold beef and pickles.

Mrs. Cox, with a sigh, then carried a tray upstairs to her third remaining daughter, for not till the midday dinner did soft-footed Pussy come lingeringly downstairs.

After dinner, a clatter of horses' hoofs was heard in the street; and, true to their word, Jack and Mr. Lee rode up. The Cox girls flew to see the mount, and to envy Daisy in her nice blue habit, looking as trim and tidy from her head to her heels as heart could wish.

"You'll do," muttered Jack, graciously, after surveying her; he was terribly particular as to his sister's dress, though merely ordinarily idea-d as regarded his own; adding: "I wish I could say as much for your mount."

The middle-aged, thoroughbred mare that stood meekly awaiting Daisy, was no doubt termed middle-aged in accordance with that polite custom of society which throws a veil over the age of all females.

"Such a lean head! That shows the blood in her," cried the enthusiastic Smiler.

True! But Daisy secretly regretted that the amiable thoroughbred was likewise lean of neck and lean of body altogether, so that its ribs showed, as Mark Twain says, like the pipes of an organ. In fact,

As lene was *her* hors as is a rake.

"And goes like a lamb," ended the deluded young man.

The mare went more like an aged ewe in Daisy's mind as they started, being, although meek, difficult to move. It had, apparently, but one engrossing wish, which was to muse in peace, "how flesh is grass, and grass is turned to hay."

They went countrywards through the most quiet suburban roads, upon Jack's insistance; somewhat to the Smiler's vexation, who made several ineffectual attempts to induce his friend to ride down the High Street.

"No, no," replied young Dimity. "If my sister can hardly manage to make her mare to *go*, it strikes me you have quite as much to do to keep your animal from going *off*."

"Wait till we get out a bit into the country, old fellow. You'll see a gallop will waken up your sister's animal and quiet mine down. I got mine from a dealer, Miss Dimity, who won't hire out his horses as a rule. Handsome, isn't he? Fresh? Oh, yes; hasn't been out of the stable for a day or two, I should think. Great thing to get such a chance. It is not everyone he would lend him to; but I bamboozled the old fellow, though he never saw me in his life before. Ho, ho, ho! a little chaff, you see, goes a long——"

At this moment the Smiler's horse—a sulky, strong, black brute—gave a succession of kicks, that seemed intended to send him and his chaff a very much longer way off than he had meditated. The little man stuck on gallantly, however, although it apparently kept him very busy.

And now it struck Daisy most forcibly that he was far from at home in his saddle, and seemed to have more theory than experience as to his management of the reins.

"Does he ride much?" she whispered to Jack with misgivings, as their companion was suddenly carried off from them, to his manifest discomfort, in a caracoling fashion.

What rounds, what bounds, what course, what stop he makes.

"Never saw him on horseback in my life before! Everybody supposed he couldn't ride; and upon my word I believe everybody was right," rejoined Jack, wrinkling his boyish brow, that had deep wrinkles brought to it every hour of the day by similar trifling cares.

Indeed, it had been rather a regimental wonder to see Smiler Lee go out this day on horseback. Many were the small bets as to whether he would come back unharmed. It was well known he could not drive, having only once or twice been induced to handle the ribbons—which he did by holding each rein in either hand well apart, and lirruping loudly at the horse. But within the wildest imagination of man it was not supposed he could be got to ride.

As to hunting, in spite of all his other accomplishments, he always frankly declared on this point his abhorrence of having his neck broken, and utter determination beforehand that, if ever anything did induce him to behave so rashly, he should get off at every fence, and, after making himself and steed clamber over the obstacle (if feasible) separately, should remount safely on the opposite side. What glamour, therefore, must little Miss Dimity have thrown over him, that, after she had innocently spoken of her love of riding, he should at once have been bitten with the mad desire thus to shine in her favourite exercise?

Presently Mr. Lee, with vast difficulty, contrived to restrain his fractious beast sufficiently to let the brother and sister come for a few delusive moments within safe distance of him.

With equal difficulty poor Daisy kept urging hers, so as to keep pace with Jack's honest cob, his private property.

She grew so impatient with her shambling equine bag-o'-bones, that, but for pure pity, she would have liked to pummel it, to whip it, to take to her own nimble heels and haul it by the bridle.

"Oh, Jack dear," she whispered, fairly maddened at last, "I wish he had hired a donkey-boy too for me, to run behind and whack."

"Sh—! Poor old Lee might hear you, and he would be so awfully vexed. But, hallo! I say—by Jove! Why, if that isn't Captain Gascoigne riding on there ahead of us! Why, Lee (with much reproach), I thought you told me Gascoigne could not come out with us to-day."

"No; I only said I thought he could not," in a tone of far from equal delight; and suddenly seeming to own that the black horse was rather hard to master, by way of stopping any further inquiries.

"If I had known that—— Why, I was almost certain you had asked him. He is the one man I would have asked to make one of our party," ejaculated young Dimity; who was secretly as hugely dissatisfied at this semblance of a slight to his dearest friend, as was Lieutenant Lee on being brought into unfavourable comparison with as fine a rider as the one ahead.

Luckily for Jack, his well-beloved Damon was not far in front; so, riding on, he soon caught him up, and had made voluble explanations, and easily induced him to join their party to Galloper Down, before Daisy and the Smiler came up, the one halting, the other demi-vaulting, at opposite sides of the road.

It was as much as Gascoigne and Jack could do, to refrain from a roar of laughter as they watched their approach.

And now what the poor Smiler had lamentably foreseen, occurred. He dared not approach Daisy; since the black horse was misbehaving most atrociously. Captain Gascoigne, on the other hand, could and did. For his horse had a delightful temper, and, as to looks, made everyone break the tenth commandment. He, himself, too, was a famous rider; and at his very best in every way on horseback.

This day he was in especially good spirits; and made himself so agreeable that poor Daisy grew all the more ashamed of her own apparent stupidity.

"What a guy he must think I look on this ugly old creature! What a goose he must think me for not being

able to talk better to him" (her mind being fretted with vainly trying to fret her Rosinante)!

The mare, meanwhile, with a humble obstinacy that was fairly distracting, seemed resolved to crawl nowhere but with her nose at a level with Gascoigne's horse's tail. Try as he might to keep pace with her, no! she slipped ever back like the famous progress of the snail up the wall, with a drooping head, as if shambling to execution.

Daisy grew maddened; her cheeks got red with impatience; her arm sore with mild persistence in using an unavailing whip.

And Jack was loudly joking at her expense.

"What a pity Mrs. Browne's 'Blessing' is not out with us! You and Higginbotham would go capitally together to-day. I have told Captain Gascoigne all about the determined way in which you tried to captivate that poor young man, and he thinks you have excellent taste."

"Oh, Jack—Captain Gascoigne never could have said that!" with a sudden look of hurt feeling, yet trust; implying, without being aware of it, by the expression of her upturned young face: "He does say satirical things and misjudge me—but he is hardly so bad as that!"

"Thank you for having a sufficiently good opinion of me, Miss Dimity; which happens to be right," replied Gascoigne; adding, with a smile of apology for paying a compliment: "I believe it was his good taste that I allowed myself to commend. It surprised me in that gentleman, I must own, for, on seeing him once, it struck me that he was,

> Rather like the snail;
> Known chiefly for the house upon his back."

Daisy feebly laughed in the background.

The Smiler was ill-judged enough to echo the mirth, with his usual good-fellowship, from the front. His horse instantly executed a gambado of the most furiously wrathful description, and forthwith, to show his playfulness, began dancing sideways, with his hind legs in the gutter. Only, as regarded his rider, he decidedly wanted to make this performance a *pas seul.*

Unhappy, lightsome Lee still tried to jest; but it was evident to everyone else that, while he strove to make a comedy of this ride, the proud animal he bestrode bitterly resented any buffoonery; and was resolved to make it, if not a tragedy, at least serio-comic.

"He'll be off soon; and your sister will be down," uttered Gascoigne in quiet, nervous unhappiness for Daisy, aside to Jack Dimity, as they went down a hill in the open country. "How could Lee be so cheated as to choose her such a brute? Not fit to carry any lady."

"Oh, it will have to do her well enough for to-day. Trust her to keep it up; she never let the governor's old horse at home down in her life, though I have——"

In a good hour, be it spoken, he should have added.

Sl—i—i—ther! Scra—amble! *Down!* No! Hi; holloa! Up again!

"Well done; well saved, Miss Dimity."

"Touch and go that time, Daisy."

There were some loose stones on the hill-side, which the poor old mare's shaky forelegs could not find foothold on; and so she had all but slid upon her knees.

"If it was not a fall, it was as bad as one," cried wretched Daisy, so unnerved by all she had undergone she was ready to weep.

Before she had ended, the black horse flung out in a volley of furious kicks; the failure of his mean-spirited companion to unseat one of their common enemies having goaded him to madness.

One, two, three! The luckless Smiler Lee at last "pighte him on the pomel of his head" in the dismal ditch. The black horse at once made a disgraceful attempt to complete his ill-conduct by galloping stablewards, but was frustrated by Gascoigne, who managed to catch his bridle.

"Look here, Dimity; we have had enough of this nonsense, surely," exclaimed the latter apart to Jack, in a tone of angered decision that, coming from him, who was usually so gentle, was rare.

Jack looked at him astonished. Still, he was used to say before now, to others who spoke of Gascoigne's quietness: "He's quiet enough; but, mind you, if once he does put his foot down, he means it."

Gascoigne continued:

"That horse would have gone quietly enough—or, at least, far better—if Lee only knew how to ride him. Your sister is miserable—her whole day's enjoyment is being spoilt; besides, she is positively in danger! I'll tell you what we must do: get off and change saddles here at this farmyard. I'll make Lee give me up his horse; and your sister shall have mine. Then, at all events, however Lee and I get on,

you and she can have a good canter on Galloper Down, and enjoy yourselves."

So said, so done. Gascoigne cut short all remonstrances; indeed, the Smiler was too crestfallen to offer any with much fervour, and eyed the black horse with a glance of injured confidence and intense dislike.

"If ever you catch me on your back again, you brute!" he murmured to himself, heartily wishing this day's ride was over.

But Daisy, with anxious eyes and parted lips, was watching how Gascoigne would manage to mount the steed of evil. It refused to let him get on at first, although he spoke to it and tried to coax it; but in a frightened manner it went back and back till it was stopped by the farmyard wall.

Then he did get into the saddle, and—everyone expected a plunge—a kick or two—a fight of some sort for mastery.

To the astonishment of them all, Gascoigne desired the horse to go on; and it obediently went. Quietly he rode out along with the others; quietly on and on they rode.

"I declare," uttered Jack, at last breaking the watching silence of the rest, "I never saw such a thing in my life. One would think you had mesmerised the beast. There never was anyone who had such a curious way of making all horses quiet. What is it? Have you a charm?"

To which Gascoigne, never boastful, answered also with some surprise:

"Really it is more than I understand myself. Perhaps, after all, the poor brute exhausted all his energies in fighting you, Lee; so that it is thanks to your enduring the worst of his misbehaviour that I have got the best of him."

Which kindly fiction, though it deceived nobody, not even the Smiler, made him nevertheless more pleased with himself; as such good-natured speeches do salve one's bruised self-love.

CHAPTER XIX.

'Tis that fair time of year,
Lady mine!
When stately Guinevere,
In her sea-green robe and hood,
Went a-riding through the wood,
Lady mine!

And as the Queen did ride,
Lady mine!
Sir Lancelot at her side
Laughed and chatted, bending over,
Half her friend and all her lover—
Lady mine!

Hot was that June afternoon as they rode.

The hedgerows, which of late had been bedded under-

neath with blue-bells and red campion—azure and rose intermingling in glorious daring of colour—were now all adorned in white, as for the bridal of summer:

> And in the warm hedge grew lush eglantine,
> Green cow-bind and the moonlight-coloured May.

White lay the dust below; snowy gleamed the great ox-eyes from the banks; creamily curved the tendrils of honeysuckle through the tangled brake: and the bindweed, tenderly clinging to every hold, offered its milk-white cup to the air and sun, that had long since drained it of dew.

Hot it was; but not too hot to be pleasant.

Only enough so to make them all gladly leave the high-road, to follow a path up a wooded glen by the side of a trout-river—gleaming dark and cool, where the broad oak branches overshadowed it, and the fish, like sprites, went darting to and fro—or brawling merrily over rocks in the open, where the woods receded and left bracken patches or a coppice of oak scrub.

> When shaws beene sheene, and shradds full fayre,
> And leaves both large and longe,
> Itt is merrye walking in the fayre forrèst
> To heare the small birdes songe.

"Oh, how lovely this is!" cried Daisy, who was used to only the sleepy, wide, flat pastures, and solemn standard elms around her own home, Elm Hall.

"Yes, is it not? I come here very often," answered Gascoigne, who was now beside her again.

"Those wretched little beggars of fish are not the length of my finger," said Jack, who was a sportsman to his very soul, and looked on all scenery with the eyes of a good shot and an ardent angler.

"How these flies do torment one's horse here!" lamented poor Lee, last of all, far down the woodpath.

Pity for his feelings prevented the rest from enjoying themselves, or, at least, expressing their enjoyment as much as they otherwise might. Although soon, when they saw, down among dark rocks, a kingfisher, a flash of living blue, Daisy could not contain herself; and, to Gascoigne's surprise, cried out with ecstatic delight.

"It does one good to see how you are enjoying yourself; to see how happy you look," he said; turning to smile at her with such a kindly expression, nay, such an admiring, friendly one, that Daisy forgot all about their previous

misunderstandings, and felt that, after all—she did like him a little.

"Oh, this horse is such a darling! Who could help being happy on his back?" she murmured, bending sideways in a supple way, so that poor Lee should not hear and be further vexed. "And one's spirits go up so high again after being low; like see-saw. I was *so* wretchedly uncomfortable before; and now I am as happy as happy can be. Don't you think all our troubles are over for the day?"

"Don't halloo till we're out of the wood! We must leave it soon, and ford the river down at that gravelly bend you see below the wooded cliff; and my horse may be, like other evil spirits, unwilling to cross running water."

"I believe *you* could make him go anywhere."

With which flattering tribute, that hit its mark, and did very much please Captain Gascoigne's conceit, to judge by his gratified smile, they reached the ford.

Gascoigne insisted on Daisy's going over first in safety, under Jack's care. But his own steed, as his little companion had prophesied, splashed through the clear stream with no more added liveliness than just made his rider show to advantage.

So Daisy thought, watching him from the bank, and was only roused from so doing by hearing Jack exclaim:

"Why, Lee! Poor Lee! By Jove, the mare is lying down with him!!"

Too true!

That most misguided (in all senses) of animals, having entered the water as reluctantly as a decrepit bather, seemed, when halfway across, to find it cool and refreshing about her old fetlocks. Switching her tail to get rid of the flies, she stood still. The Smiler, whose good feelings had been so grossly misunderstood by the black horse, now again felt his better self returning; and kindly allowed her thus to rest.

Before he knew what she was about, even as Jack's warning cry was still ringing in the air, she had abused his permission by lying down and rolling luxuriously in the water: while what became of him it would be hard indeed to say?

Amidst the outcries of sympathy, advice, and gibing, Daisy's irrepressible tinkle of soft laughter, and the louder, more unfeeling mirth of the rest—soused—dripping, in a rage for once in his life—the saddened Smiler reached the bank.

"You look, for all the world, like a water-rat," bellowed Jack.

Gascoigne, on the other hand, jumped off to assure himself that their comrade was not hurt; then advised him to get dried at a water-bailiff's cottage not far from the path, where, also, his saddle-girths might be seen to—one being burst.

Poor Lee gallantly declared he did not mind the wetting, but the saddle was another matter! He looked so doleful over the sorry figure he cut, dragging his dripping Rosinante by the bridle, whilst watering the ground himself at every step, and forlornly striving still to look gay, that Jack, in pure pity, volunteered to go with him.

"You will take care of my sister, if you don't much mind? I'll follow you up as soon as ever I can," he said to Gascoigne.

Captain Gascoigne, with a most cheerful expression, seemed to think he would *not* mind the trouble very much.

Thus, an hour later, having climbed up from the glen by a pleasant ascending path, Daisy and Gascoigne, alone together, were having a rare gallop over the moorland above.

Galloper Down was a grand place for a gallop! when once you got up to it. Turf springy, and soft as velvet, but few boulders or gorse-bushes; a glorious view over three shires, and, on this day, sun and wind at their kindliest. The sun's glory made life seem a pure delight; its heat just enough tempered to warm the moorland, and extract a thousand subtle small scents. There was a strong, fresh wind, that sent the blood dancing through the veins, yet only enough to fan a lady's cheek to coolness, as they pull up at last, and stand and look.

"Is it not grand up here?" exclaimed Gascoigne, looking away over the far expanse below them; champaign and glens; winding streams, and misty, distant, dotted hamlets; and the broad, blue sky, in which the clouds did seem

The beauteous semblance of a flock at rest.

"I love seeing so far away as this, do not you? One's thoughts always seem to be cramped, if the horizon is shut in too nearly by hills. With a wide prospect, even if one were chained still to one spot, Prometheus-like, still the mind would seem free. Do you not feel the same?"

He had grown very familiar with Daisy during the last

hour. But why expect her to agree with him in all things, as he plainly did?

She, however, answered timidly, with such deep respect for his lightest opinion, that disagreement seemed venturous —although she, too, had positively quite forgotten till now to be at all afraid of her companion; the rapid pace at which they had been riding, side by side, having shaken her out of self-consciousness.

"I am afraid my taste is not for such wide scenery, in which one seems to have *no frame* to the picture. Is not this more a panorama?" she timidly hazarded. "But I do love trout-streams and wooded glens, like the one behind us; then, to be perfect, one little peep, I think, into far-away; just one little peep, that I should like to take at times only, when one felt a wish to see out into the great world. Then it would be like coming into snug home again to turn back, and see the woods all round me."

"Why, then, you should see my house in Southshire, where the woods come down to the water's edge; and there is a river that runs through our place, where, in hot summer weather, a poor little sister of mine, now dead, used to sit. There are big trees all round, and delightful rocks in the middle of the river, that you can easily reach, and between the branches there is a peep—just such as you would like—of the sea."

"How strange!" ejaculated Daisy, staring up at him with parted lips. "Why! that reminds me so exactly of a spot somewhere in the south I used to be told of long ago, when I was quite a child, by——"

"By whom?"

A simple question, surely. Yet Miss Daisy blushed visibly, and, striving to hide that, stooped to pat the glossy neck of the good bay horse that carried her.

"Oh, it does not matter. Someone I have never seen since I was quite little. It would not interest you at all to know who it was."

"What a mysterious little lady you are!" returned Gascoigne, lightly; since no one could really associate much mystery with Miss Dimity's rosebud face. "One day you wish to explain to me something most particularly; and, when it comes to the point, nothing will induce you to do so. And now you unkindly refuse to reveal the identity of somebody who talked to you when you were *quite* little."

"You know you would not really care to know," cried Daisy, gaining courage. "He was a big boy, and I was ever so much younger; and he used to tell me about a glen he knew, that I would like to play in. There were rocks, too; and a river; and the sea; and a boat-house, like an arbour, beside a pool. Oh, I suppose there may be dozens of such places in England!"

"Curious!—There is a pretty boat-house on our river, too, close by the spot I spoke of," said Gascoigne. "Why, no one could have told you of my favourite haunt? But how on earth do you remember so well a description told you some years ago?"

"Oh, here is Jack coming!"—with a tone of more joy than his appearance ten minutes ago would have aroused, although so well-beloved.

And thus Gascoigne got no answer to his questions.

Jack related that, having seen his friend dried and consoled, the latter had decided on returning on foot to Marstown high-road, where a 'bus would pick him up! means having been found to send the mare back to her owner tied to a cart's tail, with messages of ignominy.

Their minds set free, the remaining three now resolved to enjoy themselves for the rest of the sunny evening, without thought of time. They had one more most noble canter, all the way back over Galloper Down. The sunset was a sight of glory as they turned at last homewards; and two of them at least had not only eyes to see, but could find words to admire it. (As many people think they cannot, whether from false shyness, or want of wont, or slothfulness of thought.)

But poor Jack, indeed! would have required to shout, had he wished to impart to the others any analysis of the delicate pleasure or tenderly sensuous, pantheistic joy aroused within *his* mind by the beauty of earth preparing to sleep, while the skies were flushed and flooded with gorgeous colour as the sun ever sank.

For the bridle-path homewards, through the darkening glen, only allowed of two riding abreast; and, for civility's sake, he could not ride beside his sister. Thus Daisy and Gascoigne were again together; virtually alone so far as interchange of ideas went, and they seemed to have more than ever during that afternoon in common.

Except in one new respect. Gascoigne had begun to look at Daisy somewhat frequently; and that with an expres-

sion so very like unwitting admiration that she, not being able to follow or understand him there, at such moments looked down—or would begin patting the brave "Bay Curtal" she rode on, and making very much of him.

> And as they rode along,
> Lady mine!
> The throstle gave them song,
> And the buds peeped through the grass
> To see youth and beauty pass,
> Lady mine!

"And when are we to meet again, Miss Dimity?" he presently asked, although no reference had been previously made to their parting.

"Oh! we shall see you on Sunday," she brightly replied. "For the Coxes want to take me to garrison chapel; they say it is quite my duty to see the service there. And I should like to see Jack in uniform; he never would put it on for us, except the very first time" (glancing back, with admiration more open and quite equal to that lately shown by Gascoigne towards herself, at the snub-nose and pleasantly ugly young countenance of her eldest brother).

Gascoigne smiled broadly; and answered, in a tone of almost taking her part against some invisible detractor:

"Yes—of course it is only natural you should like to see any of the military sights here that are unusual; quite so! But I do not believe you would care for them so exclusively as some of the Marstown young ladies seem to do, all the same. No, I cannot think you would," this last in a sort of flattering meditation. Then waking up again, rather satirically, "But there is one custom here on Sunday evenings I do not admire; it is the same in many garrison towns, though. That is the way in which some young ladies make arrangements with their officer acquaintances to go to church together, and come back to supper—and flirtation. It is too suggestive of Mary Ann's 'Sunday out,' and her young man coming back for surreptitious cold meat. Don't you think so? I am sure you agree with me."

How very certain Captain Gascoigne seemed to be, after this day's ride, that Daisy agreed with him in most things!

CHAPTER XX.

Wee, modest, crimson-tipped flower,
Thou's met me in an evil hour.

A LETTER for Miss Dimity.

It was lying on her dressing-table, and had come by the evening post.

It was not from Elm Hall: the first glance recognized that with disappointment, and few other correspondents in the land had Daisy. Taking it up to dally with her curiosity, as so many of us idly like to do, she saw it bore only the Marstown postmark. It was in one of the mean, narrow envelopes, too, nobody now likes; and was addressed in a vile scrawl, something between a child's roundhand and the malicious flourish that generally adorns a bill.

But Daisy did not owe a penny in the town; had bought nothing except that unlucky blue ribbon. Opening it, therefore, in happy carelessness, soon her blue eyes grew wide and quite scared-looking as she read the following threatening epistle:

"DEAR MISS *Innocent* (?) DIMITY,

"This is to let you know, though you pretend to be so very demure, as if butter would not melt in your mouth (and so young, forsooth!) that such sham won't go down in Marstown.

You think to catch Smiler Lee,
As anyone with an eye can see.

But be *warned*, for with all your pretences, that impose upon *no one*, of being so much finer than other girls *far* better born and bred, and so shy (or sly), it is sour grapes. He is too old a bird to be caught with your chaff; and soon you will find yourself the laughing-stock of the town. So be warned by a friend, and give up running, as you do, after gentlemen.

"Fie, naughty little Miss Dimity! You that pretend to be so very proper!

"This is from one who advises you for your own good."

Daisy could have put down her head and cried.

She was so shocked, so surprised and hurt. For in her own heart she knew she had tried to behave with only pleasant feeling and kindliness to all the Marstown people

whom she had met; had tried to speak ill of none; had tried to think well of them all—a harder task.

Pride and astonishment at first kept back her tears. But then, like a wronged child, her rosebud face puckered curiously, some salt drops had to be winked away from her eyes, till at last, with a sense of finding some small comfort there, she fairly hid her face in her handkerchief.

Only a few seconds, however.

Privacy was a rare treat in the Cox household; they considered it none. They were among those female beings who keep running in and out of each other's private apartments all day—even your bed-rooms not being considered by them the special sanctum you wish them to be regarded. What are you doing, sewing, writing a letter, curling your front hair? they cry. And very probably they either stand and gaze at you—in a maddening way—or else they calmly sit down for a chat, and are offended at any hint of being turned out.

A quick knock came at Daisy's door.

"What! are you changing your dress?" came through the keyhole in Birdie's voice; and Pussy and Fuzzy, from the background of the landing, could be heard inquiring:

"Shall we all come in and help you; or shall we wait outside here for you? Do be quick, there's a dear!"

Poor Daisy had only just time to hide her letter guiltily before Pussy begged her way in with caresses, for she was less easily refused than the rest.

Daisy hurried all the sooner downstairs, being clamoured for by the other girls.

"Ah! there you are—at last. Your brother has gone to wash his hands in papa's dressing-room. (Jack had been, as usual, impressed for 'high tea.') Sh——! Is the door shut? Now quick, pet! we have got something to read to you. Your brother would be wild if he knew we had got a copy."

And one of the girls hereupon produced some sheets of note-paper, covered apparently with poetry.

"I got it from Mr. Jones. I had to coax him so tremendously for it. And I had to promise to tell NO ONE who gave it to me," pursued Pussy, with eminent self-satisfaction and remarkable faithfulness of trust.

"Can't you tell her first what it is?" struck in Fuzzy.

"It is poetry upon all the officers and regiments in Mars-

town. A copy was sent to each of them, and no one can guess who wrote it. Such fun! Why, some of them think we did, I believe. All we wish is that we were clever enough" (regretfully).

"O—h! So it is anonymous?" slowly asked Daisy in a disapproving voice, with a sudden cooling of any future admiration of the mysterious poetic effusion.

"Of course it is. Some of the girls in Marstown must have written it, but no one would be such a fool as to put her name to it."

Hereupon, Fuzzy began what was plainly a parody on the battle of Ivry, "And thou, Marstown, our own Marstown," being substituted for the city of Rochelle; while it was neatly hinted that, although one regiment must soon leave (videlicet, that of Major Hodge and Mr. Jones), yet another would naturally replace it, when

Again shall rapture light the eyes of Marstown's mourning daughters.

It proceeded to observe further,

Oh! how our hearts were beating, when on the last field-day
We saw your gallant regiment drawn out in long array,
With all their glorious officers, who amongst men have no peers.

"Hum!" from little Miss Dimity. (She admired redcoats very much dutifully, but she was not quite certain of that. There could not be a Jack, or a—no—well, a Jack just! in every regiment; and Major Hodge and Mr. Jones were woeful examples of how uninteresting to her even martial heroes could be who had not the distinguished advantage of being associated with Lieutenant Dimity.) Fuzzy unheedingly proceeded,

And there's nothing we think like infantry; give us those that here is.

(An admirable rhyme to peers. But Daisy trusted her Jack would never be given over to be torn in pieces by the loving hands of the Marstown young ladies.)

There rode our darling O'Donoghue, the handsomest in the land,
And dark-haired Jones marched in the midst, his sword well in his hand.

(Military knowledge somewhat inaccurate there, as Fuzzy remarked.) While the ditty went on to tell how Colonel Dunn (Jack's colonel), had come to marshal them

In all his uniform dressed,
With a helmet like a policeman ('s?) upon his gallant crest;
He looked upon us ladies, and a tear was in his eye,
He looked upon his soldiers, and his glance was stern and high.

The metre here shifted unaccountably to a striking imitation of Goldsmith's epitaph on Garrick.

Here comes Captain Gascoigne, describe me who can,
An abridgment of all that is pleasant in man.

"An abridgment! Why, he is much taller than most men!" exclaimed Daisy, rather indignantly, giving outward expression to her feelings for the first time. But Fuzzy paid small heed to this interpolation.

"Oh! who cares what abridgment means? One word does as well as another. I daresay whoever wrote it didn't know what it meant either."

When we meet him, he's all that is good, kind, and civil,
But it's said that he hates us poor girls like the d——l!

Daisy thought that last vulgar, especially as applied to a man like her brother's friend, who was—well, just a gentleman! But as the Cox girls tittered amazingly over it, and seemed to find a most especial relish therein, she merely ventured to remark, in a cool, high tone:

"Well, that cannot be true, at all events. Why, even since I came I have met Captain Gascoigne several times, and he made himself very pleasant."

A quick look was interchanged between the sisters.

"Well, yes, dear; you have—because he likes very much coming to us," answered Pussy, very softly, but with clear emphasis. "But he goes out so little in Marstown society that, of course, the other girls are deadly jealous."

Fuzzy looked queerly upon this at her gentle sister, but steadily read on:

And so we don't know him very well, though we'd like to know him more.
And also his young friend Dimity, with his voice like a lion's roar;
They call him the British Lion, for his growl is worse than his bite.
If we didn't know what a duck he is, he'd put us poor things in a fright.

The rhymester here, having failed to get a lead from any divine poet, was plainly deteriorating. Even the praise of Jack could not lessen Miss Daisy Dimity's utter secret contempt. Fancy calling her manly brother a duck!

The versification grew from worse to worse.

Who now comes on but Major Hodge,
Oh, do not say that rhymes with podge!
He's a terrible flirt;
Oh, what a funny man is Hodge!

With quite an added impetus of inspiration, the writer now seemed to rush in verse at Mr. Lee.

Next is dear little Smiler,
That arrant beguiler,
So larky and gay,
He wheedles away
The hearts of too many a lass,
Alas!
Like dancing with him there's no joy in life
Half so *splendid*, unless he should say, Be my wife!

"Hullo! So you young ladies have got hold of that farrago of nonsense, have you?" said Jack's voice behind the group, sounding very gruffly unflattering as to their occupation.

The Cox girls started with tittering outcries, feeling caught.

"How you got it is more than I know," went on the young man, with a rather severe eye; "but I hope that none of *our* fellows were so weak——"

"Oh, dear, no; certainly not! None of your regiment were good-natured enough to do such a thing as gratify a simple request of us young ladies to see it," interrupted Pussy, acidly. "Oh, dear, no; you may set your mind quite at rest."

"Glad to hear it," coolly responded Jack; who found Pussy's temper not nearly so sweet since he had begun to pay more undivided attentions to her sister. "When the *thing* was sent to our mess, I would have liked it to be burnt—and no more notice taken; but some of the others were rather angry, and inclined to retaliate. If we had written our ideas of the Marstown young ladies, and sent it round, they might not have liked seeing themselves described either. Lee was nearly doing it; but Captain Gascoigne persuaded him not. He said it would be rather ungentlemanlike."

The Cox girls looked dubious at that; and inclined to regret that their feelings had been treated with so much consideration. Daisy's eyes brightened for the first time since they had been vexed half-an-hour ago. She did not like to say she thought the verses vulgar, but she did say, softly:

"I think that was very nice of Captain Gascoigne."

But no one heard her except Jack, who looked upon her with a brotherly eye, and said aside, observingly:

"Little one, you're tired. You've got a headache—I can see it by your face."

The Cox girls did not heed this by-play; they were occupied in exclaiming against Jack's strictures, and declaiming their contrary opinions. Where was the harm, they wished to know, of sending some verses of poetry to the officers of a regiment? They could see none. Perhaps the officers could see harm in it; but, thank goodness! they (the Misses Cox) had more innocent minds.

"Yes; 'to the pure all things are pure,'" observed Pussy, demurely, and folded her hands over each other in a way that made Jack think suddenly what a specimen of a pharisaical, mittened old maid she might become with years—in spite of her different behaviour now.

"Mind you! we had nothing to do with this. If we had, I shouldn't speak out as I do," declared Fuzzy, with honest down-rightness. "But considering that, in other ways, we have had some fun with other regiments, one likes to stand up for oneself, Mr. Dimity. Now, we sent mock proposals, last Valentine's Day, to some of the officers in—in the Queen's Own Freebooters (Major Hodge's regiment), and they thought it great sport! I would never sign the name of another girl to them—that is low! One girl did that by me, at the same time; and, if I could be sure who it was, I'd never forgive her. We never put names."

By Fuzzy's heightened colour, it was clear to everyone that her supposed declaration had been sent to Major Hodge. Daisy looked across at her with a very kindly fellow-feeling. Jack felt indignant that the recipient of that letter had ever let out the secret; and with difficulty refrained from declaring so. He gave some vent to his opinion, nevertheless, by the remark:

"Of all the low-minded, cowardly, and contemptible people in this world (and there are lots of them!), in my opinion, those that send anonymous letters are the worst curs."

Saying which, he put his hands in his pockets, a reprehensible trick; and got up to stare at nothing, out of the window, which apparently relieved his mind.

"Jack dear," whispered his little sister, passing her arm through his, and putting a question with an air of lightness, "if you were ever to get an anonymous letter, what should you think it best to do?"

"Do, child! I'd put it straight in the fire, and never tell living soul I had ever seen it. Why, bless you, the very object of the persons who can send such things is to vex you. Nobody should ever know I was annoyed by them."

Daisy took her resolution.

Jack had spoken, and, without knowing it, advised her; and he was nearly always right. Nevertheless, her heart was rather heavy with such a secret lying upon it, and no sister Polly to tell it to. (For Jack's counsel of secrecy could not have applied to her.)

So, although she bravely tried not to mind, and believed she did not mind, that thing upstairs, still Jack, by-and-by, said again in his gruffest peremptory tone:

"You've got a headache, I know. Mrs. Cox, do order this obstinate girl to her bed."

Upon which Daisy was so entreated; and went dutifully; and with secret thankfulness. Before lying down she burnt the scurrilous little note—holding it, before it was shrivelled, in the candle, as she might something of the vermin tribe.

That done her thoughts became happier, reverting to late pleasant scenes; and soon her dreams were all of gurgling, rushing waters, bright sunshine, rocks, trees, and a gallop on Galloper Down, mingled in delightful confusion.

CHAPTER XXI.

By robbing Peter he paid Paul, and hoped to catch larks if ever the heavens should fall.

When Daisy was taken by the Coxes, on Sunday, to the garrison-chapel, she felt even more shy than she had ever done since she came to Marstown.

To begin with, they had passed by the barrack-gates, and seen a mass of scarlet drawn up, and heard the clash of a military band playing.

There was really no earthly reason in that why she should feel shy, although unused to such sounds and sights, since, at Elm Hall, their way to church lay through pastoral, green meadows. But shyness, like other female qualities, does not go by reasoning; and poor Daisy felt at such times as if everything new, even the consciousness of her new bonnet, made her feel shy.

They took the places assigned them in the unpretending little chapel, and presently a steady tramp, tramp was heard nearing, and the soldiers came in by one door.

Daisy did not know any correct terms of ecclesiastical architecture, so she described it, when writing to Polly, as the "back door."

Presently, most of the officers came filing in one after another by the "front door," as she naturally called it, though it was the smallest, and at one side. Daisy thought they all looked—that is to say she knew Jack looked—as if they had all got up earlier than they wanted to, and had bolted their breakfasts, and still felt in something of a hurry, as they followed at each other's heels, clothed hotly and gloriously in scarlet and gold, on that stifling July morning; carrying their swords with an expression of countenance that an imaginative observer might have fancied to mean: We are all righteously conscious that we would go to church if we were left to ourselves; but it is quite another thing, and tends to aggravation, to be *obliged* to come!

To Miss Dimity's horror most of them—the bachelors at least—had seats just behind their party. And she now felt an inward horrible conviction that one of her hair-pins was sticking out!

She struggled righteously within herself to say her prayers, and never mind who was behind her, or what was wrong with her back plaits. But the feeling was still lurking that if Jack saw it (and he had lynx eyes for such superfluities in her attire!) how he would growl at her later, brother-like!

No, it did not in the least matter that she had seen Mr. Lee pass up the aisle, looking as jauntily gay as a pocket edition of Mars. Nor yet that Captain Gascoigne also had gone by, looking like—well, exactly like his usual quiet self—she minded none but Jack.

At last, after ten minutes of troubled agony, summoning up her courage, she stole up one hand, gave a stealthy, desperate push to that wretched hair-pin; and then, thank goodness, settled down to her devotions—happy.

The band that played, instead of a mere harmonium, such as their wheezy one at Elm Hall, impressed her very much; the number of men's voices joining in the singing she thought had a fine effect.

By ill-luck, however, when the psalms were almost over, who should come, hot and in haste, fussily ushering her whole party into church, but Mrs. Brandiston-Browne, escorted by Mr. Higginbotham. And the latter was shown into the seat beside Daisy.

It was too provoking.

Poor little girl! she could only attend devoutly to the

service, with the latent feeling that afterwards she should tax Jack severely with having smiled (behind her back), and, if he owned the soft impeachment, scold him well for allowing his thoughts thus to stray. Meanwhile Mrs. Browne's "Blessing" goggled his eyes at her, as if blankly unaware that anything more human of his acquaintance than a milliner's dummy sat beside him.

Beyond Daisy again were Fuzzy and Birdie; both equally distracting.

For the latter persisted in singing, although out of church no one had ever heard her attempt such a flight. She seemed to have an edifying belief that shrill false notes added to her own sense of devotion; if so, it was only gained by subtracting from that of others. Fuzzy took the responses under *her* especial wing, and, perhaps feeling the martial atmosphere of the surroundings, fired them off with a sharp brevity most admirable to hear—if only she had not frequently, with perfect composure, rattled out the wrong ones.

Still even this, with patience and perseverance of attention, could be overlooked. They had an admirable ten minutes' sermon from the military chaplain, containing two jokes, and the remainder common sense.

And now came round the collection-plates.

A good deal of spur and sword jingling could be heard behind Daisy's head; indistinct murmurs of "Lend me" were breathed. Nevertheless, sound, big-silvered jingles showed that, if men do not give in as many little charities as the softer sex, they give more when they do give.

Mrs. Brandiston-Browne was evidently surreptitiously feeling the milled edges of the small coins in her purse, in fear that she might carelessly give away a fourpenny piece when she had meant to bestow a threepenny one. Mrs. Cox smiled with superior elegance; she had seen to that at home.

But now it came to the turn of Mrs. Browne's "Blessing."

So slowly that the eyes of all in the chapel could not but turn upon him, that ambiguous young man drew out a shilling, looked at it dubiously, then muttered something to the collector.

The latter stared aghast.

But Mr. Higginbotham, with an air of business deliberation, held his shilling tight in the fingers of one hand, while with the other hand he began sorting out ninepence—

in base exchange! Threepence and threepence made sixpence; then in coppers he sifted out sevenpence, eightpence. A halt of a second—a doubting gaze—"with earnest eyes and round unthinking face"—then one last poke, and out came, with an air of triumph, the crowning penny!

Down he chucked his shilling.

All were at first almost too breathlessly interested and astonished to do more than keep their mouths metaphorically open.

The young man, calmly rolling his prominent eyes, handed the plate to Daisy. While he still held it, however, Mrs. Browne, who had been endeavouring, during all the time of this mercantile transaction, to pluck the sleeve of the future baronet (two lives removed), whispering, agonisedly, "Don't John; give it, John!" only unhappily succeeded in reaching the goal of her efforts now. At this supreme moment, therefore, her final pluck gave the "Blessing's" arm such a shake that, with a ring and a rattle, away flew the coins, great and small, in a perfect largesse! and went rolling into every imaginable, most un-get-at-able cranny.

In a trice Mr. Higginbotham relinquished his hold of the collection-plate; and there stood poor Daisy, who held the other side of it, "blushing like the morn," whilst a sort of internal spasm seemed to afflict all those adjacent, and the back benches were no doubt equally stricken with convulsions of suppressed mirth.

> The youths looked aside—to laugh there were a sin,
> And the maidens' lips trembled from smiles shut within.

What a situation for an unsophisticated country damozel!

CHAPTER XXII.

> Of all the days that's in the week
> I dearly love but one day,
> And that's the day that comes between
> A Saturday and Monday.
> For then I'm dressed all in my best
> To walk abroad with Sally;
> She is the darling of my heart,
> And she lives in our alley.

"You did that very well indeed, Daisy! capitally; only don't blush so much another time, when you get more used to knocking the money down."

This was from Jack, in a voice of deep, inward enjoyment.

It was after church; and all Marstown then repaired to the Mall, or rather a part of it nicknamed Prayer-book Row. Here the Cox party, after meekly walking up and down some time after chapel—looking as if waiting for nobody—had been joined by Mr. Lee and Mr. Dimity, who had got out of their uniform and into ordinary clothes with amazing quickness.

"I blushed for you, and for your unbecoming conduct in church," retorted Daisy, her spirit roused.

"Blushed for us!" struck in Smiler Lee, taking the kind office as meant for himself, too, with pleasant impudence. "You did it very nicely, then, Miss Dimity. Thank you. We'll always come to you, now, to have it done for us by substitute—ho, ho, ho!" (Then in an aside.) "Excuse my laughing—do, please; but if you only knew how becoming it is when you blush—just the right amount of colour, and your eyes light up——"

"Good-morning, Miss Dimity," said Gascoigne at that moment, having just joined the group. "I hope you will forgive me for being also among the ill-behaved persons you are so severely condemning. But really," with a broad smile, despite himself, that seemed to suffuse his whole honest face with a flush of suppressed amusement—"really you can have no idea what a picture of injured innocence you made! Everyone could see it was not your fault; but the indignant reproach with which you looked at that unfortunate young man was irresistible."

"Hallo! Have *you* come out to promenade Prayer-book Row?" exclaimed Lee, addressing Captain Gascoigne with an air of (slightly assumed) infinite surprise, yet of gay welcome to both their party and the Row. "That is something new. I thought you always patronised what I call the Hermit's Walk over there," pointing to a somewhat deserted and quieter portion of the Mall, "and that you looked down on us frivolous people here."

"He! Why, he often comes here with me," quickly interposed Jack, making that somewhat loose assertion with some inward reason (so it seemed to Daisy, who knew him well) as if not wishing his friend's appearance there to be considered singular.

The Smiler—who was really the best-hearted fellow in

the world—rapidly conquered his momentary vexation at seeing the friend who had so much outshone him during their memorable ride, again quietly taking up the place beside Daisy's side which had hitherto been indisputably his (the Smiler's).

He did remain indeed for a few minutes longer on Daisy's other side, making lively sallies to engage her attention on himself. But, on the other hand, Gascoigne had a steady perseverance that told in the long run; besides, his conversation required answering, while his gay rival's only needed applause or laughter.

And also—this he could not guess—the little damsel between them was tormenting herself with the thought that, among the many Marstown young ladies continually passing and repassing them in kaleidoscopic groups, might probably be the very one who had written that letter. Therefore—thinking her dignity required her to show in public that she was not "running after" Mr. Smiler Lee—with perfect innocence of purpose, Miss Daisy made it palpable to the world for some time that the young man was rather a courtier-in-waiting upon her sovereign pleasure.

Thus she and Gascoigne were soon left to each other's society.

"And how did you like the service this morning? I remember you were looking forward to it," he simply asked; but in a way that made his companion feel quite gratified at his having remembered her idle chat.

"After all, it doesn't seem as if I had been in church at all," she confided in reply, with quite a melancholy tone. "Between that dreadful young man, and Mrs. Browne in front always saying her prayers fully six seconds behind everyone else; and—and some other things."

"I know; I could hear the other things," smiled Gascoigne, glancing significantly at the Misses Cox. "But don't you think that, if one were really devout, we would not be aware of these small distractions?"

"Perhaps not. No. You always put things in the right light," dismally. (What sufficient experience had Daisy, by-the-way, as to Captain Gascoigne's impartiality of judgment?) "But, you see, it was all so new to me; so very different from going to church at home. May not that be a little the reason why?"

"Very much so, I should say. It is a reason I can't

plead for my frequently wandering thoughts. Well; tell me, what is your church near Elm Hall (isn't that the name?) like?"

Whereupon Daisy, with loving minuteness, described that old, white-washed Saxon church; as it was proudly claimed to be, on the strength of a bit of almost defaced carving on one stone over the porch. How it nestled among its elms; and the rooks cawed around it; and the farmers' wives clattered to it in pattens through winter-weather, or strolled thither through the wide, flat pastures in summer. How her father, as squire, had a high, black-oak pew in the dusty chancel, where he fell asleep, and the preacher was none the wiser—although declaiming from the pulpit against some of the farmers, who apparently came there to snore, tired with the week's labour.

"And if they do, Captain Gascoigne, is it much wonder? for the sermon is all text, said over and over again. Jack counted it once, when he was home last, up to one hundred and sixty-six times. Then, just as you really think it is done with, our vicar says, 'Dear friends, perhaps you would like to hear my text once more.'"

Thereupon Gascoigne laughed; and immediately began describing his church at home; not quite so old (being merely Norman) as that at Elm Hall, but equally dusty, and delightfully uneven, irregular, and leaning upon ivy-hid, more modern buttresses.

How the monumental brasses of his forefathers upon the floor showed their crusading exploits, by one having his ankles crossed, to denote a single, insignificant expedition to the Holy Land; while another, with his crossed higher, showed his conscience had rejoiced in two; but the last, the flower of the family's knights, proudly lay with his crossed at the knee; for his campaigns against Mahomed and the Saracens had been three.

> The knight's bones are dust,
> And his good sword rust;
> His soul is with the saints, I trust.

But now their pleasant walk and talk were interrupted gently by Mrs. Cox; who, using—it was remarkable—her young guest's Christian name for the first time, as if to show both maternal interest and a sort of proprietorship in her before Gascoigne, said:

"Daisy, my dear (I beg your pardon for interrupting

you, Captain Gascoigne), let me have the pleasure of introducing your brother's colonel to you. Colonel Dunn, this is my little guest, Miss Dimity."

Colonel Dunn was what appeared to Daisy a charming old man; with the frostiest of hair, the rosiest of faces, and the warmest of manners. (She was wrong as to his supposed venerable age, being misled by his white hair, but quite right as to his delightful other qualities.) Young Dimity's pleased look told that much, when his colonel welcomed Daisy most paternally as the sister of one of "his boys." Being a widower, he had two little lads with him, who were more literally "his boys;" but only apportionately more so as to the affection he seemed to shed over all, young or old, small and great, that were brought near to him in life. He talked as if he were always in a high wind; one that blew laden with health and vigour, but in which it was hard to make his voice heard.

After saying everything pleasant he could think of, as to Daisy's stay in Marstown, the old colonel took his leave—having so many other pleasant greetings to give everybody else, that he seemed continually in a gay hurry.

"Not fair, not fair to take up the time of such a charming young lady! There are too many younger men only waiting their opportunity, whom, I dare say, you would prefer very much to the society of an old one like me," he said, in adieu, waving his hand to Daisy; while his two little sons sprang to either side of him again, as if very glad he had left the ladies.

The story was current in Marstown that Mrs. Smeeth—whose classical knowledge lay open to suspicion—had been heard to say that the dear colonel with them two darling boys reminded her of a statoo she thought she had seen somewhere, or its picture.

"The Laocoon?" the Smiler had artfully suggested.

And Mrs. Smeeth, observing that very likely that was it, she was heard afterwards, in many Marstown gatherings, adopting the amendment, to his wicked joy.

Now, although Colonel Dunn had so thoughtfully resigned his claims upon Daisy's attention, Mrs. Cox was resolved not to relinquish her own hold upon her charge.

Smiling urbanely at a lady near them, with a graceful inclination of her head, and laying her fingers lightly on Daisy's arm (who saw Gascoigne hovering near), she said, with gentle haste:

"My dear, my dear, you must be introduced to Mrs. Luxton—in your brother's regiment, you know."

Daisy was somewhat displeased, for the opportunity seemed ill-chosen, Mrs. Luxton being occupied with someone else; nevertheless she tried to feel as good-humoured as possible while being trotted forward—as if she were a cosset-lamb led by a blue ribbon—by Mrs. Cox.

Mrs. Luxton was a pretty young woman, with a frank manner, and a very merry light in her eyes.

The corners of those same black eyes now twinkled brightly as she cordially received the cosset-lamb, having perceived that victim's manner of approach.

"I hope we shall be great friends, Miss Dimity; your brother and I are tremendous friends, you must know," she said. "You are walking up and down, I see; perhaps you will take a turn with me, and Fred (turning to her stout, amiable husband) will be very glad of the chance to chat with you, Mrs. Cox, I am sure."

Mrs. Cox, poor woman, murmured: "Ah!" with a slight catch of her breath. She gave one quickly furtive glance at her reproachful-eyed daughters. But she could not now prevent Daisy becoming more friendly with Mrs. Luxton than was judged expedient. The latter's frank honesty had dashed aside the pretty little cobweb she wanted to hold Daisy fast in, that the latter should not be dangerous in *any* quarter.

Up and down accordingly they paced together, and Daisy liked Mrs. Luxton very much indeed. She was so honest, amusing, and with a something about her more congenial than anyone whom Daisy had yet met in Marstown.

"You are a cousin of the Coxes, are you not?" Mrs. Luxton asked, but with some doubt in her voice.

"I?—Oh! no!" Daisy answered, with surprise; and, being a rather methodical small person, explained how that Mrs. Cox was only her *step*mother's second-cousin once removed. But, lest Mrs. Luxton should imagine she was undervaluing the connection, she felt bound to describe also Mrs. Cox's great kindness in asking her, without ever having seen herself—nor even her stepmother for long years. She dwelt upon this unexpected goodness; not understanding why her companion's eyes twinkled with more fun than ever.

But her own eyes had been somewhat wandering.

It was only natural to wonder what Captain Gascoigne

was doing; having remarked that he had not remained long with their party after being left to the blandishments of Pussy.

He had gone, as if weary of society in Prayer-book Row, to the quiet Hermit's Walk at its upper end, where he had joined two other gentlemen of equally quiet appearance, in a saunter.

"Who is that you are looking at—Captain Gascoigne?" said Mrs. Luxton suddenly. "He was with you a little while ago, was he not? I like him so much; indeed I want to speak to him myself."

So saying, she contrived to approach rather near the anchorites, as they strolled to the verge of the debatable land betwixt their haunts and Prayer-book Row, and signed to the gentle hermit in question.

Gascoigne came to her with his very most courteous manner. Daisy was beginning now to be able to conjugate the comparative degrees of his courtesy.

Mrs. Luxton told him she wished particularly to ask him to join a water-party she was getting up for the next week.

"Miss Dimity has just promised me to come too."

"If Mrs. Cox will do so," put in Daisy, dutifully.

Gascoigne would be very happy, looking really pleased; adding he had already accepted the same kind invitation from Captain Luxton.

"Dear me! did he ask you? How forgetful of me! Well, mind you do come. Miss Dimity, don't trouble yourself about Mrs. Cox; she is sure to come. By-the-way, I must be hurrying homewards. But there—she is not five yards off! Do you mind joining her by yourself?—or perhaps——"

Captain Gascoigne asked, might he be permitted to act as Miss Dimity's escort for that enormous distance. With another twinkle of her mischievous eyes, Mrs. Luxton accordingly departed; sending her best adieux to Mrs. Cox.

The latter lady called, with some flurried sweetness as her stray chick approached in this strange guardianship:

"My dear, I am afraid, do you know, we must be going. I suppose, Captain Gascoigne, you will hardly be coming our way; so we must say good-bye," with great suavity.

"Let me accompany you as far as the entrance to the Mall, at all events," answered Gascoigne, with equal suavity but perfect calm; and went on beside Daisy accordingly.

"Who are those gentlemen you were with just now?" asked Daisy, with a tinge of jealousy.

"Those are two of my greatest friends—men in my regiment."

"Your greatest friends! But I thought—" with a glance at Jack, jealous now for that human piece of perfection.

Gascoigne laughed.

"Surely one may have several friends, Miss Dimity. Your brother is the friend who persuades me most to go out into society; those others are so pleasant, they rather tempt me to keep out of it—they are such delightful companions. You would like them very much; but, like many more of the very nicest men in the army, they don't care for teas, or even balls—if you can believe it."

"You need not think me a tee-totum," said Miss Daisy, quite pertly.

The Mall was entered by an old-fashioned turnstile; and as Daisy and Gascoigne were going out after the others of her party, they stopped a moment to allow two little old ladies, the Misses Silverthorne, to come through.

Gascoigne took off his hat to the first, as a man might sure of a pleasant answering greeting, saying:

"How are you, Miss Silverthorne? I have not seen you for a long time."

But, to his evident amazement, the silver-haired, small spinster vouchsafed him no answer; and, with the gentlest of almost imperceptible bows, looked in the opposite direction with dainty dignity.

It was almost a cut; as near one as old-fashioned good breeding would allow her, at least.

"By—Jin-go!" murmured Gascoigne, in a low, astonished tone.

He reddened slightly all over his kind face, as he looked after Miss Silverthorne, with a slow surprise, and yet a pitying, hurt expression, as if a weak thing had repulsed his friendliness. Daisy felt most indignant for him. Then he turned.

The second old maid was now trying to pass through the stile. But she had not her elder's dignity, being plainly nervous or else so weak that her fingers found it hard to move the heavy stile-bar. Gascoigne quickly stepped forward, and, pushing it with his strong hand, said—with what Daisy thought the perfection of a chivalrous air:

"I fear that I have offended your sister, Miss Silverthorne, though how I cannot imagine. Will you not be good enough

to tell me what is the matter; since, although grieved at my fault, I really cannot guess *what it is?*"

"Oh! Gerald Gascoigne, not know? . . . Oh! dear me, I wish Prudence had not gone on. This is very distressing!"

The tiny little woman looked up in his face tremulously; her hands likewise trembled so much that she dropped a reticule containing her prayer-books and handkerchief.

Again Gascoigne came to her succour, and picked them up; upon which her silver-gray gown and her black lace shawl both now partook in her state of agitation.

"I most solemnly assure you, Miss Silverthorne, I do *not* know—there!"

"Oh, dear Gerald Gascoigne! . . . No, I mean only dear, dear! you know—don't say that! Such old friends of yours as a baby, and of your dear mother's, too, dear me; it is most distressing! . . . Still, young folk will be young folk, as I said to Prudence, only she said that to be bombarded with crumbs and things from a roof was not the conduct we should have expected from you."

"What! That was it?" cried Gascoigne, a light breaking upon him. "But, Miss Silverthorne, believe me, I had nothing to do with it. I——"

"Oh, Gerald Gascoigne! Say no more," and the tiny spinster held up a warning hand. "Don't say another word. I will ask Prudence . . . not to mind it any more, but—*we saw you on the roof!*"

She rustled away to join her sister, who awaited her with an air of extreme solicitude, at the result of an interview requiring such courage on the part of the weaklier one.

Gascoigne, after looking utterly dumbfounded for a moment or two, then gravely said:

"There, Miss Dimity, you see how mistakes arise in this world. And they were old friends of my mother's, who have since lost most of their fortune. So I am all the more sorry for it."

Mrs. Cox was now found to be looking back, and waiting for Daisy on the other side of the turnstile, with an air of more maternal fussiness than the latter's slight delay quite warranted. The young people had thoughtlessly hurried on ahead, as she sweetly explained.

Gascoigne took his leave.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Pack clouds away, and welcome day,
With night we banish sorrow;
Sweet air, blow soft; mount, larks, aloft,
To give my love good-morrow.

How different it was to wake at Elm Hall, at home, from waking in Marstown!

Why, at home, Daisy could always sleep with her window wide open (without fears of being warned that the policeman said it was tempting Providence, or tempting burglars). In the gray, cool dawns the sweet air at home used indeed to blow softly in, rustling her blinds. The larks in the lawn outside—that lawn on which the squire had been watching the haymaking when our story opened—the larks were sure to have left their "watery nest" to mount aloft.

Then, by-and-by, the sun would be seen peeping over the summit of the tall elms at the foot of the lawn; though, if you rightly considered it, that was pretty high already. And then was the time for universal carolling and chirping.

Wake from thy nest, robin redbreast;
Sing, birds, in every furrow;
And from each hill let music shrill
Give my fair love good-morrow.

And, after that, there would be farmyard noises, that in the early morning stillness could be easily heard, though the shrubberies did intervene; the lowing of cows, the morning quarrels and crows of poultry—most delightful of all that strangest-sounding of barndoor jubilees, telling that some of Miss Daisy's or Miss Polly's many hens had contributed one penny farthing, or whatever else it might be, according to the market variations, to those young ladies' purses, by—laying an egg.

The Dimity girls undertook the whole important charge of the fowls at Elm Hall, so, as the squire jollily said, it was but fair they should have the profits. Thus he fed the fowls, and then paid for them, and was fleeced for every one of his own eggs, and bore it like a lamb; but then his little daughters, he knew, were most demurely righteous in studying the quotations of egg-prices in the *Royalshire Extractor*, so that they should not exact even the fraction of a farthing too much from him.

So, after a few cackles from the farm making themselves

audible in spite of the rustling blinds, young Polly, who slept in a little pink-and-white nest beyond Daisy's little blue-and-white nest, would call to her through the communicating door, which the sisters always left ajar the last thing at night, that they might talk more conveniently when they ought to have been asleep.

Or if, as more rarely happened, Daisy chanced to be first awake, she would rouse her sleeping sister in the spirit of old Herrick :

> Get up, get up, for shame ! The blooming morn
> Upon her wing presents the god unshorn.
> See how Aurora throws her fair,
> Fresh-quilted colours through the air !
> Get up, sweet slug-a-bed, and see
> The dew-bespangling herb and tree.

So up these two matinal little girls would rise, and begin dressing in a violent hurry, as if afraid that otherwise they would certainly fall asleep. At least, Daisy always did so. By-and-by drowsiness would make her begin to dawdle, so that each time she softly called through the door to Polly, "What are you about?" it always cost her a pang, for nimble Polly was sure to say: "Curling my hair," long before the tongs on her plump, slower elder's dressing-table had seen the heating flame. Wicked little girls, you may say, thus to touzle the soft, yellow locks Nature gave them; but then, theirs were just the faces to look so much prettier with this fashion.

But at last both would have dressed and prayed, and been outside together, tripping over the dewy meadows or through the fresh-smelling gardens, where the roses were newly washed and waking, while they heard

> The cuckoo, loud on some high lawn.

And they would say to each other, with always fresh pleasure, as if they had never said it before: "Is it not delightful to be out in the morning early?"

After this there were a hundred little duties to perform—the eggs to be gathered; the various clutches of chickens to be counted and fed; little clucking colonies to be shifted bodily, with their mother, house, and a square yard of noble-wired-in demesne, to fresh virgin soil.

Then came family prayers, read daily by the good squire in a hearty gabble which nobody could understand; since, never having been taught elocution in his youth, his manner

of delivery was to take a tremendously long breath before every two or three verses, and then utter these with all the words tumbling on the top of each other After which he always made a pause, and laid in a fresh stock of air.

But the household, being used to this, always followed at a less break-neck pace with their own books, and the elder sisters kept the tribe of Gad to order and attention.

The tribal lessons came on after breakfast.

What conscientious efforts Polly and Daisy made with those brats! How deeply they sighed over Bobby and Billy and Jemmie, who rebelled against their authority; and, although seeming healthy and exulting in rather too many wits out of doors, assumed an appearance of lumpish dulness in the school-room that might almost have led one to dread water on the brain, or future idiocy.

A little such dulness, then all the more blithesomeness.

By the noonday workmen's bell all this mental labour was joyfully ended; and for the rest of the morning only pleasure remained to the sisters.

The squire would be calling to come out and see the hay; or the bees might be swarming; or there was the boat waiting to be paddled up the slow, sleepy river, past the elms and among the water-flags and lilies. Or Slug would want an easy canter along the shady side of the meadows.

Luncheon done, and the sleepy time after existed through, the basket-carriage and fat pony might come round for Mrs. Dimity to be driven by one of her willing little stepdaughters to see the vicar's wife; the gentle but incapable stepmother being frightened at holding the reins, herself, of even the dullest of Dobbins. Or else they would be driven by the old coachman in the big carriage, with the pair of fat horses, to pay afternoon calls on their rather distant, few, and sleepy neighbours.

Although respecting the latter very much, and seeing them seldom, the Dimities always said, "Let us hope they will be out," with as fervent unction as would people hurrying through a London season; feeling certain that the first instinct of many of their neighbours would be to hide behind the laurel-bushes, although they, too, really liked the Dimities.

Failing these efforts at participating in gay society, as Mrs. Dimity persisted, with meek obstinacy, in regarding them—there was the village to visit.

This was a comfortable little hamlet, consisting of about half-a-dozen scattered cottages, all as snug as could be, the united households of which possessed between them all only two sick and one very aged inhabitant. These latter the two little Dimity sisters conscientiously visited very often indeed, carrying little baskets of blessings, old port, and new flannel; although an acid-minded person might have said with truth that these gifts were really luxuries, not being positively wanted; and that millions of unknown beings needed them far more.

Then the sun would begin to sink, and a sense of good rest after good labour to steal over the happily-tired earth and its workers.

> The evening comes, the field is still.
> . . . . . .
> Deserted is the half-mown plain,
> Silent the swaths! the ringing wain.

Yes, it might be dull in the country; it was quiet, but who could say it was not happy in the jocund summer-time, who, at least, that was as fresh, and young, and happy-hearted as Daisy Dimity and her hardly full-grown sister?

The good squire would nod indoors after his hearty dinner. His meek partner, dreading dews, would carefully shut out the soft night-airs by closing the drawing-room windows tight, and pulling down the blinds; calling the dusk blind man's holiday; and ringing at the earliest moment for a double-burner lamp. Sitting primly upright under this on a low but a very stiff-backed chair, Mrs. Dimity would nightly have so many long seams of what she euphemistically termed "white work," that what became of it all was a marvel, even bearing in mind the wants of the turbulent tribe.

Of course a sewing-machine would have hemmed these far quicker and better, but Mrs. Dimity looked with an eye of rivalship upon sewing-machines. White work was what she had been brought up to sew of an evening; and it seemed as if white work alone could or should occupy the second Mrs. Dimity's evenings for the remainder of her life. Summer or winter, thus she sewed. But she liked winter evenings best, because then she could spend longer hours at the long white seams.

The tribe, thank goodness! would now be safe, and, let

it be hoped, quiet in bed. But Daisy and Polly were neither nodding nor sewing indoors.

Out in the sweet summer dark or the moonlight they would be, rejoicing in all the summer's beauty that abides in our cool little isle so short a space. They would be listening to the nightingales which sing in happy Royalshire, or chatting together up and down among the rose-trellises, or the pleached alley, or by the borders of the sleepy wood and sleepy river.

And what they could find to talk about, seeing their lives were so simple and same, it would be hard to say! But theirs were healthy, harmless, jocund lives, and at sweet seventeen a little makes us laugh.

> Oh, primavera! giovent ù dell' anno!
> Oh, gioventù, primavera della vita!

Well, and how did Daisy wake in Marstown?

First, no sweet morning scents of mignonette or hay to salute awaking senses.

Instead of the lark's sweet lay, far on high in the sky, came up from just below in the street the cry of "Umberell-*a*hs to mend!" in always hoarser reiteration.

As to prayers, the girls never came down to them, so poor Mrs. Cox read them aloud for Daisy's benefit, and when she had no guest, presumably read them to herself. But it was always precisely at prayer-time that the barrel-organ, or the German brass band, would choose to strike up some ear-splitting valse exactly opposite the window.

The Cox girls made no pretence any longer of coming down in time for breakfast; but, treating Daisy now with real confidence as one of themselves, left her to be their mother's only matutinal companion.

Afterwards—well, we know how Daisy hitherto spent most of her time; but a confidential letter to Polly may tell of some small remaining thoughts thereon, left in the crannies of her mind.

"(*Private!!!*)

"Darling Polly,—Don't show this to anybody else, though I've nothing very particular to write.

"I got up quite early to have a chat with you. It is very hard here to get any time to myself; for the Cox girls always scold me when I sit down to read or write. Then all morning other girls run in and out visiting, and a great many gentlemen come at tea-time.

"Oh! my dear, on Sunday night I was so mortified. We went to the cathedral in the evening, which I would have enjoyed ever so much, but that Major Hodge and Mr. Jones came with us, and would keep whispering and laughing so much with Fuzzy and Pussy that the service was quite spoilt.

"Jack, of course, was with us too.

"Mrs. Cox made ever so many excuses for not being able to ask Mr. Lee too—*for me!* She said the doctor did not like so many coming back to supper.

"I told her the truth—I was very glad she had not; but hope she did not see that I was hurt at the idea of having anybody asked for me in that especial way. Perhaps, when one has been out longer, one would not mind so much. Also I could not tell her that Captain Gascoigne thought it vulgar.

"And there he was in the cathedral, with two such nice-looking, quiet men, his friends; and once, in the Psalms, when the rest were handing chocolates to each other and giggling quite loud, he looked round! I did so wish I could have been a church-mouse and had a hole to creep into. Then going out, he said to Jack in the crowd: 'Are you all going back to supper?' Perhaps when Jack said 'Yes,' he thought one of the gentlemen had been 'asked for me,' for I almost fancied he looked at me. But indeed I came and went with Mrs. Cox, and never even *looked* at them.

"And after supper that night, Major Hodge actually tried to pay *me* attention (which I thought very horrid of him!). I put him off, for our poor Fuzzy is so fond of him and looked so jealous.

"Indeed, the old doctor helped; for in the evenings at home, if any gentlemen come in, he always makes a great fuss about me; comes and says, 'Ah, Charmer, or Beauty, we have not met all the day, now let an old man have a *little* chance of a talk.' Then he puts me in a corner, and sits in front staring at me with his funny round face and big eyes, admiring my arms, or hair, or feet, till I am quite uncomfortable and don't know what to say. Or else he asks me to play draughts or backgammon, saying there is nobody he ever liked playing with so much. Of course it is very nice he likes me so much; still—quite between ourselves!—he is rather a pleasant old humbug, I am afraid, for when no strangers are there, he just goes to sleep and forgets all about me.

"Papa sent me a kind message to bring back the Cox

girls, if they liked, to stay as long as they chose, for a quiet visit.

"But when I told them, they seemed very doubtful; having found out that the only unmarried gentleman near Elm Hall is the curate, and that he has taken a vow of (can't spell it!)—Pussy called it 'perpetual selfishness'—they quite decided against coming till we have our hunt ball next winter.

"Fuzzy said to me, 'You see, dear, it would be *such a waste of time.*' You may think that horrid of her, but it was very honest. She really always says the worst of herself, and is most kind and good-natured.

"Indeed, they all mean to be that towards me; but it is not quite so hearty and sincere in the other two sisters, I think. Birdie is often very ill-tempered with the rest, because she is the spoilt child. Then she rushes to throw her arms round my neck—and kisses *me*—saying she is very naughty, but will never do so any more. I sincerely wish she would not; for I can't quite believe now in her repentance, and don't want her apologies.

"You ask which I like best, Captain Gascoigne or Mr. Lee. Dear child, how can I tell you; they are so different! Of course *you* would like Captain Gascoigne best—there is no doubt about that. He is not what you would call frivolous, and no one on earth could help respecting very much. And then he is such a good man—at least, *I am sure he is!*

"But though, of course, you would be right, still Mr. Lee is very nice, too. He never frightens one by being severe, like some of the other gentlemen; and sometimes, if some of the others have made me feel shy, he quite cheers me up; he is such fun, and pays such delightful compliments.

"Now good-bye, darling. Do you miss me very much? I do so wish we could have a good chat this minute together. With fond love, ever your most affectionate sister,

"Daisy.

"P.S.—I tried hard not to write this—but really must just tell you. When I happened to be looking over Birdie's music yesterday, there were three songs with, 'From Jack to Birdie,' written in her own hand. Only fancy! anybody might have seen it. What would they think? It annoyed me very much.

"Oh! my dear, on Sunday night I was so mortified. We went in the cathedral in the evening, which I would have enjoyed ever so much but that Major Hodge and Mr. Jones came with us, and would keep whispering and laughing so much with Fuzzy and Pussy that the service was quite spoilt.

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"P.P.S.—I opened my letter, being afraid that my last secret may make you uneasy, to confide that it is after breakfast now, and Jack came up, so I thought it right to tell him what I had seen. It took a great deal of courage, being afraid he would think me *interfering;* so I first begged his pardon before he knew what it was about. (Luckily, none of the girls were out of their bed-rooms yet.) I said it made me quite afraid he was *engaged;* and of course, though Polly and I would be fond of anyone he chose, still I did hope he would think well over it. But all he did was to pinch my ear, and go off into one of those great yells of laughter that we are always telling him are quite vulgar. He said, 'Oh, I must tell that to Gascoigne. Gascoigne must hear that.' Then in sailed Mrs. Cox, to know what we were laughing about. (Somehow, Jack and I never get a minute alone.) But, when he saw I looked distressed, he came and pinched my other ear, whispering, 'All right, little one, don't you be afraid; I can see through a milestone as well as most people yet. And you may tell Polly, from me, that one sister is quite enough plague for each of you yet a while, in my opinion!'

"There, dear! it is a great blessing to think of that, isn't it?

"For otherwise, although I do think Jack oughtn't to, it never would do, would it?

"Yours again,

"D. D."

CHAPTER XXIV.

> And trust me, dear! good-humour can prevail
> When airs and flights and screams and scolding fail.
> Beauties in vain their pretty eyes may roll;
> Charms strike the sight, but merit wins the soul.

"What! stuff the bodice with sawdust to make a fine figure of it. Lovely idea! What a clever, angelic Daisy you are to have such a grand idea!"

"Indeed! Well, Miss Cox, I call it a hideous, horrible idea," growled the deep voice of Jack Dimity, as, unannounced, he entered the Miss Coxes' "muddle-room" unawares. (He had, however, been "made free" of that retreat on the strength of his relationship to Daisy.)

"And did I hear this proposition coming from my

innocent little sister, too? Daisy, if you've got any sawdust about you, I'll—I'll run a pin into you! Come here, miss, this instant."

His denunciation was greeted with a chorus of shrill girlish laughter. And then Fuzzy, as soon as she had breath to speak—for the Cox girls always laughed loud and long, and then would very likely have two or three fresh outbursts all over again—explained, with her usual love of military expressions, that meaning to have "a field-day" to review all their old dresses, and see how these could be "titivated" up afresh, they had lamented the expense of going to dressmakers, and the trouble of fitting gowns themselves on their own persons.

Whereupon Daisy, with a most glorious flash of inspiration, had suggested to make themselves a lay figure—a milliner's dummy.

"But stuff myself with sawdust! that would be a *deal* too much, Mr. Dimity—ha! ha! Now, Birdie, don't pinch me. If you can't make a pun yourself, that's no reason why you should always try to stop everyone else."

For Birdie, whose wits were not so keen as those of her two elders, but who always liked to be foremost, had a smart way of thus asserting her powers of bodily raillery, or of stifling her sisters with a sofa-cushion; they did not like it, but strangers always laughed.

"I know," continued Fuzzy, elated at having triumphantly dodged her younger's attack, and pleased to secure Jack's attention for once, "I do know that *that* Miss Black, for instance, whose figure all you men admire so much, is all made up with—what do you think?"

"Oh! hu—sh, Fuzzy dear," murmured Daisy, rather scandalised. "Jack, just look here at our future Aunt Sally." So saying she held up a stout holland bodice, tightly closed up everywhere except at the neck, where the sawdust was to be put in. This was her own invention, and she eyed it with pride, though it still hung limp as an empty balloon.

Then said some of the female voices:

"But how on earth is it to be mounted?"

"Two broom-sticks, or the supports of a clothes-rail," promptly uttered Jack, who prided himself on a taste for practical carpentering, and loved driving nails. "I'm your man."

His help was accepted with joyful alacrity. Everyone

now had a surfeit of suggestions to offer, and all the cooks began the broth. Fuzzy, however, made the hit of the day by remembering that their parlour-maid was a perfect virgin mine of possibilities in the way of clothes-rails and sawdust, since she had an admirer who kept a carpenter's shop in a back street hard by. Thither the demure damsel was accordingly sent tripping. Before long she returned smiling, laden with spoils; whilst Jack was still ferreting grimly in the doctor's tiny cellar for cobwebbed remains of wine-boxes, the only spare timber in the house, except Bryant and May's matches, as Fuzzy told him.

Then how they set to work, like new brooms, with a will!

How Jack hacked and sawed with an old rusty pocket-knife and a broken carving-knife, the only tools that could be found, and quarrelled with them alternately, grunting to himself! How the rest dribbled the sawdust into their holland case, and kneaded and pounded down in turns till their fingers were sore! How, as they advanced to the so-called waist of their dummy, they fell into Pygmalion-like ecstasies over its growing life-likeness!

"It is getting exactly like Miss Black; and I vow it shall be called Miss Black from this time forth for evermore," declared Fuzzy. "Daisy dear (in a loud whisper), do you know she is a rival of yours, or rather you have cut her out? Little Lee used to flirt with her most tremendously before you came, and——"

"What is that you are saying about Mr. Lee?" called out Jack straightforwardly.

It was not the first time, it struck Daisy, how odd it seemed that the Cox girls and their friends used to talk of gentlemen behind their backs without any prefix to their surnames. Whereas, on the other hand, men such as Jack —who were of course far more familiar with their comrades —never did so, but set them quite a contrary example.

"I was only telling your sister about Miss Black, and her passion for the Smiler; which is evidently more than his for her," lightly answered Fuzzy.

"Humph; the less Daisy knows of that young person, in my opinion, the better," bluntly uttered the carpenter; who had just succeeded in reducing the extremities of his clothes-rail to human length, and now, with grunts and much disfavour, was hewing a round stand by help of his trusty, many-bladed knife, out of an old Marsala packing-case.

"I don't call Miss Black a lady. She tries to talk on the Mall with any officers she meets, though she never saw them before. And she inveigled Mr. Lee out in her boat, and then upset him, though she can row right well when she pleases. Of course, she meant him to save her from a watery grave, with a romantic ending; but, luckily for him, she found herself clinging to her preserver, who was a snuffy old boatman that had fished her out. Poor Lee can't swim well, so he was nearly drowned. Besides, as she's not particularly particular herself, she is always trying to accuse other girls."

"No, does she! Oh, what does she say of us?" asked all the Cox sisters in one breath.

But Master Jack, perceiving how near indiscretion he was, relapsed into reticence; only remarking:

"No matter. Daisy, remember, I won't have you know her."

But Daisy now knew enough; she was almost certain now who had sent her that horrible, poison-rankling, anonymous letter.

Just then Mrs. Cox entered the room; a thing she hardly ever did when one of the especial gentlemen friends of her daughters were there.

"Which of you girls will go to the market for me?" she said, in a low anxious voice.

One of the two quiet little school-boys, whom nobody but their mother and the servants ever seemed to regard, was unwell that morning, and kept at home. He had eaten too much suet-dumpling in the kitchen, the only place in the house where these two little come-too-lates were free to make a noise. The mother did not like to leave him: the servants had no time to go out.

"Do, Birdie—do you go, my child, for me. You are doing nothing, I see," and Mrs. Cox, hearing herself called for some of the multifarious household duties that she solely fulfilled, glided away.

"Yes, do go, Birdie. We are all busy except you," cried her sisters.

In truth, that youngest Miss Cox, who hated all work, after beginning the sawdust with ardour, had desisted on the first moment of feeling tired. She was now sitting beside Jack; teasing him by slipping tintacks into his pockets; or twisting and untwisting her handkerchief till it became a wisp—her favourite trick.

"I won't!" And Birdie, with flashing eyes, sprang up from sitting on the carpet, and came across the room, her rosy cheeks in a flame. "It is just like your selfishness and unkindness to propose me, you nasty, spiteful thing!" she whispered to Fuzzy, but very low, lest Jack should hear; and she enforced her words by a quiet pinch that made poor Fuzzy start, and only nobly refrain from a shriek when she remembered the guests. She just murmured reproachfully:

"Oh, Birdie, you make my arms all black and blue; and the marks do stay so."

"You need not try that with me," calmly remarked Pussy now, to her younger sister, with a determined eye. "For I *won't* stand it; and perhaps you don't want yourself exposed before—him," (glancing at Jack. The latter, as Daisy saw with regret, had one eye for all that was passing, although ostensibly hard at work creating his wooden skeleton; and he had suspiciously begun to hum a tune.)

The aggrieved one went on in increasing anger.

"Don't you know, miss, that ever since I had fever last year papa said I was not to be put in a temper, for it was so bad for me. And I will be in a temper now; I will!—and it is all your fault, and so I shall go and tell him!"

She seemed resolved to execute her threat; for at once tearing her handkerchief down the middle, she bit it and stamped, with tears filling her eyes. Pussy looked at her utterly unmoved; Fuzzy, dreadfully ashamed, tried to coax her out of the room. But Jack called out carelessly:

"I say, Daisy, could you not go to the market for Mrs. Cox? You're such a regular old housekeeper, nobody could do it better; and the rest are busy."

Daisy had been busier than any, and the most pleased with her own invention. But she instantly agreed, with a bright smile, and ran out of the room like a good-humoured but rather frightened, little rabbit, glad to escape from the late scene.

This changed matters: so, after an inward struggle, Pussy joined her, as the one of the two elders who could best be spared. However, all the way to the market she relieved her mind by hanging on Daisy's arm most affectionately, and detailing, in weeping tones, all that the household had to endure from Birdie's ill-humours; above all, to what trials her own angelic temper was put. She was a quiet enough languishing girl herself, but bore grudges long in her

heart; and seemed to have such a smooth surface of mind to offer to society, that one seemed never to get a good mental grip of what she was really like.

However, Daisy did her best under the circumstances: consoled and encouraged her. She only said a few words of plain, direct sympathy; but a great many that were gay and friendly; till, at last, Pussy uttered, with more warmth of sincerity than was usual with her:

"Well, I must say you are a good little thing. You make me feel better for being with you."

The market was crowded with fruit, and at one of the stalls they came full upon Mr. Jones, eating early plums.

"Have some?" he stolidly asked, in answer to Pussy's expressions of delight on having met him. "Don't be shy. I assure you I've just eaten two dozen and three myself," and he pointed to a goodly row of stones and plum-skins to confirm the tale.

Daisy looked at him open-eyed, thinking him surely a most greedy young man; but was rather distressed when, with an air of the greatest good-humour, he pressed not only his uneaten plums, but cherries, strawberries, every fruit upon the stall, on her and Pussy's acceptance.

And, although Daisy strove to decline, her friend took all with such laughing satisfaction, that, not to seem conceited, Miss Dimity reluctantly consented to eat a few cherries—seeing that Mr. Jones grew only the more obtusely and good-naturedly pressing, the more she refused.

Next, a gallon of peas must be bought, and brought home in the basket Pussy carried; otherwise, as she openly said, "Those market-women always sent short measure." She and her cavalier began chaffering, accordingly, at all the stalls in succession; or rather, Pussy haggled at each, always offering a half-penny less than the last price to which bargaining could reduce them. Pussy had a quiet passion for bargaining.

At last Daisy could see that even the infatuated swain was growing sick of this. Poor soul! although good-humoured to the very scorn of his detractors, he had a man's dislike of such small dealings; and, to Daisy's horror, she saw him slily hold up a sixpence behind Miss Cox, to the market-woman's gaze.

"Oh, come—you'll give them to such a pretty young lady," he cheerily interposed, with a guffaw.

The woman, smiling, gave way; and with triumph Pussy

marched off, bearing her peas ineffectually covered with a scrap of brown paper, to hide them from the public gaze. Daisy, at that, hastily bought a big posy of mignonette and rosebuds, with which she tried to screen the obstrusive pods that offended her fastidious eyes.

"There is Captain O'Donoghue," suddenly cried out Pussy; pointing to an alley which was a short cut through the market, and much frequented. "Daisy, hurry and speak to him."

But the latter hung back. "I don't like to, indeed; I know him so slightly."

"Little goose! You know him twice as well as I do. You've danced with the man, and I've hardly spoken to him. (Which was strictly true.) Well, I suppose I must go myself for you. Captain O'Don—o—ghue!" and off started Pussy on a smart chase.

The Beauty was gently sauntering along, seeming to disapprove of the fish and butcher's meat smells that came "betwixt the wind and his nobility." He was evidently thinking of nothing, although caressing his long blonde moustaches with an air of thoughtfulness, when he was thus suddenly boarded by Miss Cox and taken in tow.

Being brought back to Daisy like a noble captive, he smiled upon her utterly sweetly; and, seeing that the little damsel looked timid, turned the tables by soon seeming to assume that he was the gentle conqueror.

"What—you are leaving the market just now? Well, then, let me take care of you through all the dangers of the mazy streets and fearful crossings—eh? Aw—won't you?"

"It is not in the least necessary, thank you; Miss Cox and I can very well take care of each other home," coldly replied Daisy, although rather frightened at her own boldness.

"But three is no company; and our friends in front are evidently not anxious to give you very much of theirs."

In fact, while Daisy still spoke to the handsome Milesian, the others, as if taking for granted she would secure his companionship, had started homewards.

"I shall catch them up in another minute. They will wait for me. Pray don't take the trouble of coming with us, Captain O'Donoghue, for this is quite the opposite direction to the way you were going. I see that . . . and you may have business . . . Pray don't come out of your way."

"It is not in the least out of my way; and, I assure you, I have no business," returned the gentleman, striding beside her as Daisy hurried along.

His manner was much less patronising now, for he could tell by his little companion's last tone of sincere entreaty that she really did not wish to have been thrust thus upon his society.

"Let me just go with you, till we catch them up; then I will say good morning, Miss Dimity."

Ah, yes! That was said with a really true-metalled ring, Captain O'Donoghue; still it was easier said than done. For the couple in front were positively racing to keep ahead—and a guffaw that came back from Mr. Jones showed they considered the matter a capital joke.

Outside the market, there was a perfect network of small streets, many quite slums. This was not the direct way back for the young ladies, as Daisy's companion very well knew, so he suspected a plant. But poor Daisy, he soon found, was so unaccustomed to finding her way in any town, that she was as innocent of the others' guile and almost as helpless as a new-born babe.

The fugitives had just rounded a corner some few seconds before the others; but on coming up not a trace of them was to be seen. They had apparently vanished.

"They may have gone down this alley."

"No. Well there is another opening; let us try that."

No again. At last came in utter despair: "Where *are* they gone? Oh, Captain O'Donoghue, they can't have forgotten, and left me to go back alone with you. That would be too unkind of them!"

"Well, yes; it would be a shame. But I'm afraid that is precisely what they have done, Miss Dimity," slowly answered her caretaker pityingly, twirling the tip of his right apology for a whisker.

"What—forgotten me?"

"Well, if they have forgotten or not hardly matters, does it? They have given us the slip, anyway—eh? But I say —aw—don't look so tremendously vexed; please don't. Look here—come now, I'll see you back the whole way quite safe, upon my honour."

CHAPTER XXV.

Above all other praise must I,
And love my pretie pigsneye;
For nonne I finde so womanlie
As my sweet swetynge.

No doubt the gallant O'Donoghue would have been very pleased to act escort all the way home, as he had offered, to our little lady.

But this was precisely what Daisy did not wish, although there seemed no help for it.

She looked at the disreputable little alleys near with shrinking, and knew very well she would not have dared to ask her way through them. It was an evil trick to play her; and Pussy was the quietest seeming of the Cox girls, too.

Captain O'Donoghue had not any intention of presuming upon their position; he was a gentleman, though a good deal conceited. But he was also so used to flirting that he could not leave off his second nature, and would have paid compliments to his grandmother on her good looks if no other female happened to be present.

Could he help it that, being tall, he must bend his head a little down towards this distressed, small "maye;" that, being aware of having fine eyes, he should show them to the most advantage by looking at Daisy with sweetly protecting glances?

It was not in his nature to like being hurried, accordingly the Freebooter paced by her side at such a gentle saunter that her impatient, hurrying little feet had to linger also.

And, as it was in his nature to talk soft nothings and nonsense, much as he would play a mild game of lawn-tennis, with all the girls he knew (knowing most expected it of him), how could he guess the growing embarrassments of poor Daisy?

He did not guess it. She was too utterly fresh from green pastures, too unused to the ways of men, for his understanding.

So they paced along, and she felt like a fluttered dove taken under the wing of a handsome falcon.

She did not know how to look at him; did not know what to say; did not know what to do. For surely Mrs. Grundy would think it a most bold and shocking proceeding for her to be seen walking through a town alone with a

gentleman—a strange one, too, and one of the Queen's Freebooters!

She felt so guilty, she did not dare to look around, feeling as if all the passers-by must be framing severe verdicts upon her behaviour. But, at last, when they had been for some minutes in a better street than those from which they had emerged, curiosity prevailed, and a blue gaze timidly searched around for any chance accusers.

A great start! A full stop—an exclamation of horror!

"There is Captain Gascoigne! Look—on the other side of the street!"

"Who? Oh! that man in the 'Strappers;' so he is. He has been walking opposite to us for the last quarter of an hour, I should think. What of that?" drawled O'Donoghue, looking across to the individual in question; who was going with leisurely steps, his nose in the air, as if that, his principal feature, wished to convey to the world that he was not going to intrude it into other folks' affairs, while his whole attention seemed unusually given to

The nice conduct of a clouded cane.

"Oh! but what will he think?" in a tone of increasing agony. "He will think it so very strange to see me walking alone with you. Let us go across the street till I tell him how it happened, please."

"Really, Miss Dimity, I do not see that it is necessary to explain to all the passers-by the cause of our being seen together," stiffly answered Daisy's guardian, with a very offended expression. For when thus interrupted in the gentle tenor of his way, he had just been murmuring the hope (in modern language!) that so charming a distressed lady, aw . . . did not dislike being thus rescued by so gallant a knight, um!—eh?

"No, no; I don't mind about other people seeing us so much, but Captain Gascoigne——"

"What! is he such a favoured individual? I *beg* your pardon, Miss Dimity, for not having been aware of it. I must congratulate you—congratulate him rather on being such a happy man."

"Oh! don't, please," cried Daisy, blushing crimson with mortification and shame. "You know, I don't mean that; you must know. It is only that—that he is my brother's greatest friend, and——"

At that very instant, Gascoigne shot a swift glance across the street at them; rather as if he had done so several times before. He saw Daisy colour. She tried to bow, but before she could do so, he had looked carefully away again.

"What! and you think he will tell your brother and get you a scolding, eh? Poor little girl—is that what she is frightened at? Come, he could never be such a brute. Shall I speak to him by-and-by and try to square it, eh?"

"No; please don't."

It was with difficulty Daisy prevented herself from bursting into tears, although they filled her eyes she hardly knew why.

But to know that Gascoigne must have been seeing her since ever so long ago, apparently nestling under the falcon's wing; to feel now as if he must be aware, even though he did not look round again, of her guardian's new tone of fondling, pitying patronage, that roused her spirit like an insult—it was too much!

"No, please say nothing whatever to Captain Gascoigne. I can speak to him myself, if it is necessary; but it is not," she repeated, with freezing dignity. "He may tell what he pleases to my brother; I am not in the least afraid of Jack misjudging me. Only—many thanks for having brought me so far; but I think it would be best for me to go home alone now."

"Eh? . . . but why, in the name of all that is foolish? You see Captain—aw, what's his name?—Gascoigne, and instantly you are wanting to bolt."

"Because I don't wish to meet *any* acquaintances. We—we don't like walking alone with gentlemen in our part of the world, Captain O'Donoghue."

"Ah! really, although there are so few there, I believe. You surprise me, Miss Dimity; for there must be a great many cows to be met with in your walks abroad" (in a rallying tone). "Come—eh? Be a sensible child. Why!—give you my word, I walk about the town with some different Marstown young lady almost every day of my life—'pon my honour I do; come now."

"Very likely. But I am not a Marstown young lady, and now I *will* go back by myself," in a tone made more fiercely decided by being in a pet, and in overwrought distress.

Captain O'Donoghue stopped still—smiled—took off his hat.

"I never go against any lady's will, Miss Dimity; so I wish you a very good morning."

He turned, and walked rather sharply back in the direction from which they had come, whistling lightly to himself.

Daisy walked on by herself, with additionally dismal feelings.

"There—I've vexed *him* now; and it was good-natured of him, after all, taking charge of me. Just like my stupidity. How could Pussy play me such a trick? Oh, dear; I wish I was back home at Elm Hall!"

And she did not know her way in the very least!

In front was a street, containing two cheap butcher's shops, round which many of the lower orders were jostling; also a public-house. It was really a street used very much as a thoroughfare; but to Daisy, unused to all back streets, it seemed of the slums, slummy; and her heart sank at thoughts of traversing it utterly alone.

Besides—was it the way? Which—where—was the right way, alas!

No matter; there was Captain Gascoigne's tall figure still sauntering easily ahead, so taking him as her beacon, this poor little shipwrecked mariner crept humbly in the distance after him. A gang of rough workmen came shouldering along, and she quailed. Just then she saw Gascoigne halt and look round, so took heart of grace and went on.

A second time, at a crowded crossing, he again slackened his pace, and seemed to watch her over it. But outside the public-house there was a little crowd, where some wrangling was going on. Daisy was almost inclined to believe, but was not yet quite sure, that Captain Gascoigne had been watching over her safety before—but now—? Now he stopped a third time, and fairly waited for her to come up.

"There seems a row here, Miss Dimity. Perhaps, since you are alone now, you would like to have an escort past it?"

Such a coldly civil tone; such a cool glance; surely a faintest emphasis of that *now*.

And he had never said, How do you do?

This so cut Daisy to the heart that she could have cried again; but, feeling unable to speak to her own satisfaction,

she only made a little assenting gesture, and still more meekly went, with small steps, after her new escort.

The danger passed, Gascoigne, in his turn, stopped still—took off his hat—but did not smile at all.

"Your road is clear now, Miss Dimity, I think; so I shall wish you good morning."

He had turned away, when he heard, with some surprise, a small voice behind him:

"Oh! do stay; just listen to me for one moment, please."

It was said with a little gasp that made Gascoigne look down slightly startled. Then he saw that her eyes were rather like wet veronicas, and her face quivering.

"What has distressed you? You have been vexed. What is the matter?" he exclaimed, with real concern.

"No, I am not vexed, except—— Yes, I *am* vexed because you—you must think it so strange of me to have been walking alone with *that man!*" Thus the handsomest officer in the British Army was designated by this slighting, small personage! Such is fame!

Then, as her new protector waited, still more surprised, the whole history of the desertion in the market was hurried out.

"And I have been so miserable, ever since I first saw you, wondering what you could think of me."

"You were *not—really?*" with an immensely flattered tone, and a look quite as tender as that of the Beauty; but which, however, did not rouse Daisy's illogical spirit at all. He seemed thinking:

> She is so proper and pure,
> Stedfaste, stabyll, and demure,
> There is nonne suche, ye may be sure,
> As my swete swetynge.

With almost a bashful air of pleasure, Gascoigne allowed himself to say:

"Well—I confess to having been a *lit*-tle surprised; for it seemed unlike your usual habits. Still it is very good of you to have thought so much of my opinion."

"Oh! but ever since you found that horrid book in my workbox, I have been always afraid you must think so strangely of me. And indeed, Captain Gascoigne, it was only put there for a joke by some of the rest, because they said I was so ignorant! Don't you remember, I wanted to explain it all to you in the gardens next day; but somehow you frightened me too much—you *do remember?*"

Remember? . . . Of course Gascoigne remembered . . . And so at last this famous EXPLANATION was made. It would have been unlike mortal man not to be still more flattered at such reverence.

"And you have thought about such a little matter *all* this time!"

That was all he said.

But it was evidently enough in Daisy's eyes, for she looked down.

"And now," went on Gascoigne, still gratified, but briefly, as if present affairs must not be neglected any longer, "how are you going to make your way back? It is quite easy, however. You can find it?" This last was uttered inquiringly, as, despite his tone of assurance, a shadow of doubt flitted over the clear face before him.

"I have not the slightest idea where I am; or which is the way," with equal assurance to his own. Then, with reviving spirits, and an air of innocent trust in him, "No matter; will you show it me?"

"But how about the Marstown gossips? If it is wrong to be seen alone with Captain O'Donoghue, is it quite harmless to be seen with me?" smiling.

"I—oh! I—I never thought about that," murmured little Miss Dimity, looking down.

"If even I could go, I am afraid I dare not now," went on Gascoigne, pulling out his watch. "For, to tell you the truth, I ought to be doing some rather important business; and have delayed almost too long."

"You waited to see me in safety! Oh! please hurry away; don't wait any more—thank you already so very, very much."

"Wait a moment. Let me see you start safely first. You must go along this street to the church; then take the second turning to your left; then the first to your right; then the first to your left, and there you are. Can you remember?"

"I must take the second turning here—no I mean after the church—to my right, then the next to my left, and then —why, there I am!" glibly repeated Miss Daisy, who had almost as simple a head as her field namesake.

Poor Gascoigne sighed. Suddenly, he exclaimed, with joy:

"Look! there are the Misses Silverthorne; they are going home to lunch, I know. Promise me to follow them exactly, and they will lead you next door."

"I do promise."

And away went her guide with a light heart and relieved air.

Daisy now kept religiously trotting at a little distance behind the two little old ladies.

She could not help trotting, because they trotted; if she went at her usual pace she found herself close on their heels; if she went slower she was vastly afraid of losing these her last protectors.

A hansom tore past her at great speed, soon after she had started; and Gascoigne smiled out of it upon her, like the sun-god out of his chariot.

What a hurry he seemed to be in! How twice, thrice, too good it had been of him to delay thus long on her account!

So a young person with a most smiling face and quite restored happiness followed the old spinsters past the church; then down the several turnings to left, to right, and so on.

Now they had come out into a street beside a square; which square was the haunt of many poor dogs, very likely homeless, that found it convenient to slip through the railings, and thus often escape persecutions. One such sad cur, slinking from his oasis of refuge, had just found a nasty bone in the street, and was giving himself the toothsome delight of a worry before making off to safety with the treasure trove. At the same time, a little white dog that belonged to the Misses Silverthorne trotted up, very much with the same action as his mistresses; and stood still to gaze at the vulgar sight.

Some people tell one that *all* dogs are unselfish, friendly, and full of virtues, putting us to the blush. That I do not believe. No more than I believe that *all* children are charming and angelic little creatures. One of the latter whom I knew used to have a playful habit of creeping under the dining-table, and transfixing the calves of the legs of his father's guests with a carving-fork. His fond parents declared he did this in angelic innocence, in the supposition that the victims enjoyed the game equally with himself, and that he took their starts and outcries for exclamations of delight. I always looked upon that child as an incipient young ruffian.

As to dogs again, I hold they have their different characters just as children. Broadly speaking, they are likewise all that is innocent and excellent. But still there

are black lambs in the fold; just as crows, however honest, have some thieves in their community whom they always promptly judge and kill. Some dogs are conceited, and growl if laughed at, to their silliest old age; others are selfish; and some few, however well treated, have a surly spot in their hearts, never eradicated; possibly from not being taught a canine catechism.

Thus the little white dog of the Misses Silverthorne stood and sneered at the dinner of his dejected neighbour. He raised his upper lip, showing an offensive tooth as he did so. Just in the same way we always show our eye-tooth when we sneer; which Professor Darwin therefore calls our canine tooth, proving thereby our doggish derivation in the chain of evolution.

It was nasty of the little white dog.

And, to be still nastier, he now made a feint of snatching himself at the bone; purely with a view of teasing. He had a way of thus outraging the feelings of other dogs, and then taking refuge under the petticoats of his mistresses.

But the poor outcast was too hungry to discriminate nicely between practical joking and reality, when his only meal was endangered. He gave a gu-r-r of warning! Sir Impudence turned one eye upon his mistresses, who had instantly stopped to protect their darling; then like an old actor "measuring distance" to their skirts, danced at the bone again.

One growl! a dart—a roll in the dust! and terrified squeakings followed. "Fido! Fido! Policeman! My darling! You brute! Come here! Be off! Po-liceman!" shrieked the horrified old ladies; not daring even in that sore distress to raise their voices to an indelicate pitch of screaming, whilst in a terrible fright they feebly beat on the enemy's back with their lace parasols.

But—long before the human blue-bottle at the street-corner would have bestirred himself—help came.

Daisy had rushed to the rescue; and being as fearless as any country-maiden could be in such matters, caught the bigger dog by the throat and choked him off. Luckily his mouth had been so full of Fido's woolly hide, that the latter was barely scratched, when the eldest and most courageous of his old mistresses snatched him up trembling. So all might have ended well, but for the misery-dulled perceptions of the poor street-cur.

Only seeing in Daisy another claimant for his wretched bone—just as she released him, he turned and bit her arm. Then, with a howl of mingled vengeance and triumph, he sprang upon his booty; and tucking his tail between his legs so that no pursuers should get a bite at it, he disappeared between the square railings, and out of this history for evermore.

"Oh, are you badly hurt? Dear, dear! she is bleeding. Sister, sister, call a cab, and let us take her to a chemist—no, to the doctor—no, the hospital! Oh, how grieved we are! how thankful we are—— !"

"There is no cab-stand near. Are you faint! Let us support you to the end of the street till we get one."

Thus the two silver-gray dressed spinsters exclaimed in tremulous tones, hovering round Daisy.

To their vast relief she laughed bravely in their faces, and tied her handkerchief round her wrist herself. It was a mere nothing, she declared; they must not be troubled about such a trifle.

What could they do for her?

Well, please, could they show her the way home—to Khyber Pass Road?

"Why, that is our road also!" cried the little old ladies; on which, each offering to support Daisy home on either side, they overwhelmed her with tender little ejaculations and inquiries.

In a few minutes they reached the Khyber Pass Road; and delicately inquired to which of the brand-new, red-brick villas Daisy was bound.

"Do you live, my dear, in Khurum Vale, or in Coomassie House?"

"In neither; in Magdala Villa," replied Daisy, in a rather subdued voice.

"In—deed? We did not know—we did not recognise you as one of the Misses Cox," murmured the sister-supporters, in tones that might have been frosty but for the thawing warmth of their gratitude.

Daisy explained that she was only a visitor there, lately come.

"And we live next door. Ours we call Lilac Lodge. We did not like these bloodthirsty, military names. We wanted something to remind us of the country, although we do live in a garrison town," cooed the old Misses Silverthorne.

And then both exclaimed in the same breath to each other:

"Sister, sister; see how pale she is getting! You must come in with us, poor child. We will get you a glass of wine; we must bandage your arm."

They were so eager on either side of her that Daisy could not resist them; especially as she had begun to feel rather sick, as much with her excited walk, and the heat of the sun, as from the dog's bite. It was grateful to find herself being led, with gentle utterances of sympathy, into a shaded, almost dark room—fragrant with flowers—exquisitely cool.

"Bring a glass of madeira—our father's *old* madeira, sister," whispered the eldest.

Then Daisy was forced to swallow such a glass of wine as was molten gold, compared with Mrs. Cox's cheapest of Marsalas.

Meanwhile, the most smiling of comely middle-aged maids had brought hot water and the softest of linen napkins, marked (as Daisy languidly noticed) with a date quite half a century old. And such gentle fomentations followed; and pitying of that plump white arm; and tender bandagings as would have half-cured anyone.

"I feel quite cured, now," Daisy declared, when, at last, all was ended, and she felt really herself again.

"But sit still, my dear, and use these smelling-salts a little more, and let me put just a *lee*-tle more toilet-vinegar on your temples, and some eau-de-cologne in your palms," entreated the old ladies; and then they looked at her and looked at Fido alternately, almost as if she had saved the life of the child of their old age.

Then they began to chat, their hearts being opened wide.

Their young visitor told them very soon how she had come to stay for the ball given "by her brother's regiment." (She always spoke as if the full regiment of "Strappers," from colonel to drummer-boy, belonged wholly and solely to Lieutenant Jack Dimity.)

"And so you have never known the Coxes before," said these old ladies, much interested, and giving each the slightest of little coughs at mention of the Cox family. "We —we never have called upon Mrs. Cox; for really—well, the fact is, my dear, we call on very few people, unless they are connected with old friends far away from here. You see, having come late in life to Marstown, and living in such a

very quiet way in this small house, we did not think any young people like your friends would care for the society of such old frumps."

Daisy—having a sudden conviction that some of the Cox girls must have been overheard using this epithet of their neighbours—gazed rather wide-eyed at the sisters.

Frumps! Well, it would be hard to call them so. Nothing more neat, more delicate and dainty could be imagined, among old maids, than the appearance of these white-haired spinisters in their silver-gray dresses. They looked fit to be put under glass cases; with their old-world, good breeding that seemed to exhale from each as a surrounding atmosphere. One could never declare wherein peculiarly lay the old-fashioned charm suggesting the good old term "gentlewomen." Their carriage, old and stiff as they were, was still straight-backed as that of an Evelina; their pose perfect; the way in which they shook hands, a mixture of gentle warmth and intense dignity not to be described; the air of self-identification with whatever concerns of their guests the latter might be speaking of, utterly absolute.

And yet, in the latter instance, no one could think them humbugs, though when the guests left not another word on this subject ever again crossed the old ladies' lips. Only for the time being they had tried to carry out the Christian precept, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." The occasion gone, they turned to receive the confidences of fresh visitors.

Tattling, or gossip of others' really private affairs, they held vulgar: beneath their dignity.

The room that held these two old-fashioned specimens of bygone English life and breeding, almost cheated one into believing it belonged, not to a new villa in Khyber Pass Road, but to some quiet home of several centuries ago.

All its summer draperies of good old-fashioned chintzes, such as are never made nowadays, seemed to have been washed just yesterday and dried on some cowslip green; while the scent of country jasmine and bean-blossoms almost, to the fancy, hung upon them still. The floor was mostly polished, because the well-worn but still handsome Turkey rug in the centre was so very small. There were also tables and a few chairs of fine old carved oak, with an "S" for the family name in medallions. If the rest of the furniture was painfully new, that unwelcome fact was almost hidden from

prying eyes by cushions of finest needlework which one's eyes were strained in admiring; and tablecloths and coverlets that had been embroidered with flowers and shepherds and their sweethearts, in days when Time ran far, far slower than now.

And however old and long-used all these plainly were, they were not shabby; having been kept with too much loving pride and care.

All this, which takes somewhat long to describe, had stolen into Daisy's perception in a few minutes after she had entered the house. She felt in the presence of gentility that did not grieve by its poverty, although it suggested former comparative riches. Rather the old Silverthorne ladies seemed to possess a slender but sufficient stipend; a modest competence. However much more they might have had, at present they seemed to have *enough*.

Meanwhile, they in turn had been examining Daisy Dimity.

They saw a sweet fresh-looking maiden, small, trim, and plump, with very nice clothes, very well put upon her. And surveying her kindly from the crown of her yellow, daisy-like head to her neat little feet, one sister said to the other, hesitatingly:

"Surely we have seen Miss—Miss Dimity somewhere before?"

"Oh, yes," quoth the guest very promptly, with some terror at her own boldness. "It was on Sunday, when you made such a mistake about poor Captain Gascoigne. Indeed! it was a great mistake. Please forgive me for saying so, but you wronged him very much."

The sisters looked at each other astonished.

"What mistake, my dear? Do tell us. Yes, yes; you must certainly tell us."

So, blushing now at playing Portia to the absent one, Miss Daisy did modestly tell them the story of how unhappy Gascoigne had been at the practical joke played on his friends. "And he told me you were such great friends of his; and how much he liked you."

"What a mistake we did make! Certainly, it seemed very unlike dear Gerald Gascoigne—poor Geraldine's son. His mother, my dear, was our very greatest friend."

The sisters were so happy at this terrible mistake being set to rights that they could not sufficiently thank Daisy for

thus restoring to them, as it were, not only Fido, but also their male human favourite.

"You will promise faithfully to come in every day and have your arm dressed by us—by no one else," they repeated again and again, as Daisy bade them good-bye.

So she faithfully promised.

When she crossed the threshold of the Coxes' work-room once more, Jack's voice cried cheerily out:

"What hours you have been, little slow-coach! Look at our glorious Aunt Sally."

A horrible travesty of human nature, with a stout body, skeleton legs, and an old crinoline for the display of future draperies, stood in the middle of the floor.

The dummy was, indeed, a success.

CHAPTER XXVI.

We three Archers be,
Rangers that rove through the north countree,
Lovers of ven'son and liberty,
That value not honours or money.

We three merry men be,
At a lass or a glass under greenwood tree;
Jocundly chaunting our ancient glee,
Though we had not a penny of money.

What a sensation of curiosity, mixed with a little awe, and not without a dash of embarrassment, it must give every well-brought-up country maiden to go to her first military dance!

Her first military dance, and perhaps only her second one of any kind of dance hitherto whatsoever!

Add to this that Miss Daisy Dimity's very first dance had been rather disappointing—almost "scrubby;" whilst *this*, all her female friends declared, would be "scrumptious." And that she was also by nature a flaxen-haired, blue-eyed little soul, made to be much petted, and a good deal admired; but very demure in her flirtations. Thus you have Daisy's state of mind, when going to the dance given by that favoured regiment which was graced by possessing Captain O'Donoghue as its own.

The narrow stone staircase up which they were shown gave first a feeling of disillusionment, for it seemed to Daisy very like those leading to her father's granaries at home. The white-washed walls were cold, forbidding, and surely

not very white; the paint on these doors they passed really not spotless. But inside the cloak-room, what a difference! This was some officer's room, so fitted up with almost luxuries as to make one think that soldiering was not altogether a lot of unmitigated hardship, with a "lodging on the cold ground."

"What a lovely big glass over his chimney-piece, and *real* lace on the velvet flounce below! Dear, dear! officers were not so extravagant in my young days," sighed ponderous Mrs. Smeeth, who was disrobing herself from a Paisley shawl.

"Flounce, mother—it's not a petticoat," scornfully ejaculated Essie, flouncing at her mother. "It's Captain O'Donoghue's room, I'll bet, for he is so fond of looking at himself."

"Do, Miss Dimity dear, just peep into that photograph-book beside you, and tell us who is in it," playfully whispered Miss Grace.

"Oh, no—indeed, I would rather not," answered Daisy, recoiling, and shaking out her skirts busily.

"Here's pink powder and white!—every comfort provided," exclaimed Fuzzy Cox, eagerly dusting her face with some *poudre de riz*; whilst Pussy, with a simper, musingly appropriated the Bloom de Ninon, thinking that would suit her complexion better.

In the background, Mrs. Brandiston-Browne was deluging her own and her daughter's handkerchiefs with perfume from some of the cut glass bottles liberally displayed by the unknown owner.

"One doesn't keep it at home, my dear," she confidingly nodded to Daisy.

Daisy wished everyone would not confide in her; besides, she rather disliked scent, preferring soap and water.

When all the girls had in turn hated each other for staying too long at the looking-glass, Mrs. Cox marshalled her party into the ante-room.

Daisy felt as if plunged at once into a group of uniformed men that seemed all eyes, stares, and red jackets, to her frightened imagination; not one of whom she knew, or at least recognised. When she recovered from her bewilderment, she found that Captain O'Donoghue had stepped forward, after his colonel received them, and was smiling on Pussy. Pussy, to whom he had never spoken before that day at the market! With much by-play of eyes and mutual murmured chaff upon the trick she had played him, he was writing—writing—writing his name on her card.

Daisy, being apparently quite forgotten by him, gazed transfixed from behind Mrs. Cox's sheltering skirts. It was *she*, nevertheless, for whose sake all the Coxes had been invited.

Not that our little lady really minded a bit; only her pride was slightly touched, and she felt that "now she knew what men were."

Strange faces, strange faces all around; tall men, stout men, young and old, slim Adonis and corpulent Falstaff, all alike in short mess jackets.

Almost all these were busy writing their names on the cards of the different girls, except on that of Daisy. She knew not one of all these strangers—Jack was not there. The Coxes were carefully filling their cards first, before thinking of her.

Yet stay. Two thin youths, with drab faces and tow-coloured hair, suddenly advanced upon her with joy. They were Jack's juniors, who had so unmercifully pounded her feet to a jelly at Mrs. Browne's dance.

"We got away before all the rest of our older officers, so as to be *sure* of some dances," remarked one with satisfaction. "And now, Miss Dimity, may I have the pleasure of this—and this—and this?" (the very best valses).

"You'll give me the '*Très* jollée waltz,' won't you, Miss Dimity?" urged his companion. "That *Très* jollée *is* so jolly, isn't it?"

"But really, Mr. Blount," mildly expostulated the wretched Daisy, with her feet aching at the recollection of their former suffering——

"*I* am Mr. Hunt; this is Mr. Blount," eagerly interrupted the last youth, and both swains gently smiled, unconscious of her sufferings.

"We are rather alike, so we are sometimes called Castor and Pollux," hazarded the least timid of the Gemini.

With some difficulty their victim had just rescued some of the best dances from the pencils of these "heavenly twain," when Captain O'Donoghue led up two or three eager, dark-complexioned, black-haired youths.

"Have you got any dances to spare, Miss Dimity?" he asked, with a gentle smile that was almost malicious.

And, as his followers admiringly closed upon their prey, he patronisingly murmured in Daisy's pink shell of an ear:

"They will just suit you, I am sure; they are all such good boys."

With an inward very great sigh, Daisy relinquished her fond hopes and her card. She had a vague idea now that *all* Jack's beardless subalterns had lint-white hair and well-bred, timid manners; and that all Captain O'Donoghue's young Freebooters must be swarthy-visaged youths.

It puzzled her frightfully to find out, by-and-by, that this rule did not always hold good; as, during the evening, with youthful generosity, each of these swains brought likewise up their dearest comrades to share the delights of an introduction to—and possible dance with—this new girl, who was (in turn with all new girls) the rage in Marstown.

The dancing was in the mess-room; of which no more need be said than that it had a floor polished to glassiness, a low ceiling, and whitewashed walls decorated with crossed flags.

Daisy saw the other girls disappearing after the first valse, down passages here, and passages there.

The place reminded her of a rabbit-burrow.

But she, not caring much for Mr. Hunt or Mr. Blount's company (which it was she never knew), returned dutifully to Mrs. Cox's side. The latter gave her each time an elegant, faded smile of real liking, and satisfaction that here was no rival coquette.

Just as the second dance was ending, a fresh influx of red mess-jackets signalled the arrival of "Jack's regiment." With heartfelt joy Daisy saw her brother, *her* Jack in his uniform, looking sternly round him from the doorway, like the dear, snub-nosed, square-shouldered young Briton that he was.

In her eyes he was quite as handsome (in his own way) as Captain O'Donoghue himself.

And there behind him was the friendly face of the "Smiler." And—and there was no one else except such small fry as Colonel Dunn, and Jack's two majors, and Captain Luxton and his merry wife, whose faces could be discerned in the rear!

Smiler Lee dived straight across the room through the mazy dance, and accosted Daisy with the air of one on his own ground—as surely a dancing-floor was his realm.

"I must see your card to-night, Miss Dimity; it is my business to keep your accounts still, isn't it?"

With a glance of dumb sorrow, the partner of Castor and Pollux dutifully gave up her programme. She merely nodded in silent regret, as Lee inquiringly read out, in an undertone, ("Hunt, Blount—Blount, Hunt! Well you *did*

come early to-night!) But I say, (aloud) you promised *me* two of these valses, Miss Dimity, the other evening, don't you remember?"

"But I did not know you were coming to-night," scenting deliverance, yet fearful of hurting her captor's feelings.

"Still you promised me these dances first."

The king of the ball-room looked with such an indignant eye upon Castor that that poor young sub-lieutenant meekly offered to resign one of his ill-gotten prizes. Pollux, who was easing his back against the acute edge of an adjacent door—waiting for his turn to claim Terpsichore for his kick-and-shuffle attempts at learning to dance—was dejectedly obliged to follow suit.

After which Mr. Lee, with calm satisfaction, restored Miss Dimity's card, confiding in a whisper:

"I have put myself down for five more—seven in all. You will give me them, of course, won't you? Fact is—do take my arm, and sit out with me until our next dance comes—the fact is, there are two girls in the room I am determined not to give one single turn to to-night! so I want to dance a lot with you."

He led Daisy along one of the cold, stone, white-washed passages, down which she had seen the other girls going.

They turned into one of several tiny rooms (obviously the lairs of some of Her Majesty's officers in their normal state, but now to be regarded only in the light of flirtation-boudoirs). This one showed tokens of sleep, smoke, and study; sleep signified by a sort of big wardrobe door, closing an alcove, but giving passage to air at the top; smoke faintly suggesting itself by scent clinging to the window-curtains; study—a large amount of novels bestrewn on the top of military drawers.

But there were two little round tables; four easy-chairs, twos and twos; a subdued light and some scattered knick-knacks to trifle with—which all encouraged the boudoir idea excellently well, especially when helped by the mutual sentiments of whoever sought a *tête-à-tête*.

"I'll tell you all about it," began the dapper little soldier, with an air of cheery confidence, twisting up his moustaches fresh, and smiling upon Daisy, as if the sinner had never smiled on anybody before, or asked sympathy from pretty listening ears—although he spent so much of his life in doing both. "It is so jolly to meet a girl like you that one

can make a real friend of! Mind you (sighing with a dramatic air), there are very few girls that a man like me can make a real friend of. Now there is Miss Black—you've heard, I suppose, of that poetry she sent with all that stuff about a lot of fellows and ever so much praise of me? Yes. Well, that girl is awfully gone on me, they say—I'm only just telling you this in strict confidence! But I am determined not to go near her to-night, for it's better to put a stop to that sort of thing at once—don't you think so? I can't blame my conscience; I've only danced with her a good deal because she has a good step; but it's better to show her at once I can't have that sort of thing."

Daisy listened in some doubt as to what that "sort of thing" was, love or doggerel. But as she sat with rosy lips just parted, and big blue eyes all attention, she looked the very embodiment of a sympathetic listener.

So the Smiler continued, quite delighted with her and with himself:

"And then, would you believe it?—I was never so near being caught in a trap as this very night by old Mother Browne—this very night, as I came in! (solemnly). She stepped forward, in her fawning way, and asked me, would I not take her for a cup of tea? But, thank goodness! some fellows had put me up as to what that trick meant——"

"What?" asked Daisy, most interested, for the speaker assumed quite a tragic air over his deliverance.

"Why, she sits down, and begs one to have a little chat, and then asks one's intentions about her daughter—ugh! Luckily I never lose my presence of mind; never. I begged her to excuse me for one moment, as I knew there was a young lady expecting me to dance with her (that was you!). And I got Captain Gascoigne to take the old woman off my hands for tea——"

"Cap—tain Gascoigne? Is he—did he?"

"Yes; why do you look so astonished? Oh, he did it; yes. He didn't care—especially when he knew why I wanted to be rid of her."

Did that mean with reference to dancing with Daisy herself; or to Mrs. Browne?

Daisy dared not ask; but soon, slowly raising her head, that had been very much modestly downbent, whilst pondering over this enigmatical sentence—whom should she see, calmly examining the room and its inmates from the threshold,

but Gascoigne himself. And that dreadful living mummy of a woman, Mrs. Browne, was smiling on them too lividly, with her parchment face.

Gascoigne looked irritatingly, maddeningly composed (although he now saw Daisy for the first time since that day at the market). She felt hot, and inwardly quite excited; he seemed outwardly cool as a cucumber.

He was gone with his companion!—even whilst foolish Daisy sat almost expecting him to rush across the room, and ask her for a dance—foolish little Daisy, as if he would, with Mrs. Browne on his arm!

With a sigh in her heart, our heroine went off to dance with Smiler Lee.

Most beautifully they danced in swift, smooth gyrations, Lee with his left arm held stiffly out like a ship's bowsprit, to warn all feebler dancers from his glorious path. People looked at them admiringly: among others Captain Gascoigne from the doorway, against which he had made himself a sort of caryatid.

But that dance passed; and yet another with Mr. Blount; and still he never came, nor asked poor Daisy—although he kept watching her.

She was quite heart-sick about it.

After that walk home from the market it seemed so strange, so extraordinary! in a friend; a real man-friend—her friend, Jack's friend, and no flirt like Captain O'Donoghue.

She had still managed to keep some cherished dances, hoping he might ask for them—when, with a good-humoured grin, Major Hodge bore down upon her, followed by a dark florid gentleman, with the air of a conquering carpet-knight.

"I'm so awfully sorry my own card is quite filled up—going away, you see—old friends, and that sort of thing, ha! ha! *twigges vous!*" he whispered to Daisy, who rather drew herself up at this familiar form of address, as if she wished to dance with him at all. But the gallant Hodge-Podge, in his own good-humoured, if unrefined way, was resolved to patronise and be good friends with little Miss Dimity; so continued, eyeing her as he might a new-born chick, "I want to introduce Colonel Burke of ours" (in a whisper); "he's considered the handsomest man in the British Army!"

"He's what?" thought Daisy, so astonished to hear of another Richmond, of anyone in the same room with

Captain O'Donoghue asserting rival claims, that she found herself weakly giving up one of her few remaining treasures, her last valse, to the stranger.

"Ah! now, but ye are in luck to-night, Burke," said Major Hodge, trying to mimic an Irish brogue, and making, like all Saxons, a hideous failure.

"Arrah, then! it's meself that is," responded Colonel Burke, in a feigned Irish accent also, but a more real-seeming one; although, like many who attempt this Doric tongue, his was the accent of a car-driver, rather than of a gentleman—a much easier imitation.

It sounded so strange, coming after the well-bred tone in which he had addressed Daisy, that she looked at him in mute surprise.

Then—then she found Gascoigne himself addressing her! and turned to him, utterly forgetting the other two, who felt themselves dismissed with a suddenness which a good deal surprised them.

"You have been dancing everything, as I saw—but now may I have a dance at last, Miss Dimity?"

"At last! You should have asked me some time ago, as other people did," half-pouted Daisy. "You have waited so long my card is almost filled."

"Your card. Ah! I forgot—how I do hate cards!" answered Gascoigne, slightly waking up from his dreamy tone. "They are only bills for the bores of the room by which they can dun you. If ever I want to remember a dance later on I can—could not you?"

"Oh! yes (meekly). But please, all I have left is one galop later on, and this slow dance—do you mind much?"

This "slow," a thing rejected of all her partners; though, like a tyro in conjuring, she had meekly tried to force it upon them all. It had been flouted with desperate scorn even by Messieurs Hunt and Blount as "a square dance—no, thank you; I only care for a waltz!" with sniffs of superiority.

But Gascoigne took it now good-naturedly, Daisy's glance being certainly appealing.

"I know exactly what you are thinking; you like to dance everything, no matter with whom, like all very young girls. You would be miserable at losing these Lancers," he said, leading her off.

Miss Dimity rather resented the "no matter with whom,"

and intimated as much. Her partner quite smiled on her, putting away his gravity; his large nose even looking handsome with happiness as he answered:

"Well, then—we are to believe that, whoever you may dance with to-night, you like very much."

"But not the strangers—how could I? This Colonel Burke, for instance, who seems such a dreadful Irishman! And why is he called the handsomest man in the British Army, when I thought that was Captain O'Donoghue?"

"To my certain knowledge, I have already known seven 'handsomest men in the British Army,'" calmly returned Gascoigne, smiling again at her air of bewilderment. "And as to his accent, Colonel Burke, I believe, was never in Ireland, though he loves to be considered a genuine Irishman. Captain O'Donoghue, on the other hand, was born and bred there; but he does not think it necessary, I suppose, to remind the world that he comes from the 'distressful country.' Those are the contradictions one sees constantly in life."

Colonel Dunn (Jack's colonel) just then came up with Mrs. Luxton, and invited this couple to be their *vis-à-vis*. His frosty hair and rosy old face beamed and gleamed above a breast so covered with medals they seemed the easiest jingling ornaments in the world to get.

"Jack says his colonel is quite a hero," uttered Daisy, with another surprised look. "And yet he looks so fat and good-humoured one can hardly well believe it."

"Still he has

> Trod as deep in the red wash o' the wars,

as who walks reddest," smiled Gascoigne, with a new teasing air. "What wonderful experience you are gaining in Marstown, Miss Dimity! You have learnt that heroes can look both jolly and even common-place. And as to being fat—you severe young lady!—have you never heard of

> Plump Comus in a colonel's coat.
> Whom we this day expect from far,
> A jolly, first-rate man of war?

"Now, that is poetry I do remember," cried Daisy, delighted with herself for once. "And you always remind me of the man who

> One sole virtue would arrive at,
> To keep his many virtues private."

She was becoming a perfect coquette; it was such barefaced flattery! But she was really so happy, she did not think much of what she was saying. And off went Gascoigne with an equally happy air, looking, in her eyes, "a verray perfight gentil knyght," to shuffle up and down in an aimless way before Miss Essie Smeeth.

No doubt this chasséing and glissading was an excellent opportunity for our ancestors to display their canary-coloured coats and gorgeous small-clothes. But nowadays, when our gentlemen thus "take the flure," as the Irish say, they seem either not to know what *they* are to do, nor *why* it should be done; or else some jovial wight will delight a whole room by a few sorry little steps and a caper—whereupon everybody laughs very much, seeming at once to have a revelation that the solemn farce they were all engaged in was not really a stately dance, but simply a burlesque.

Miss Essie familiarly tapped Gascoigne on the arm with her fan.

"You haven't asked me to dance yet, so you'd better be quick about it," she informed him.

Gascoigne, in a manner so quiet it might almost have been suspected of satire, replied:

"I am dancing very little, indeed, to-night, Miss Smeeth."

"Oh, come. You can dance with little Miss Dimity, at all events, it seems. And you know you've never asked me to dance yet, so you must do so some time or other."

"Then, if I happen to see you standing any time to-night, Miss Smeeth, I shall hope to have that pleasure. Otherwise, I never engage a young lady beforehand."

"All right—well, now, don't forget." And, the dance being over, away went Miss Essie with a sportive air, as if she was longing to tap every other gentleman in the room on the shoulder, too.

"And I hope you won't forget my galop, Miss Dimity," echoed Gascoigne, turning to his partner. "All rules have exceptions, you know. When is it——?"

"Hush! Please take me away somewhere, and I will tell you another time," whispered Daisy, in a mysterious manner. "That young lady in black there—who is she? She looked at me so strangely, as you spoke, it quite frightened me."

Gascoigne looked quickly.

"It is a Miss Black," he said, as he led her away.

Cr-r-r! At that moment Miss Black, passing them with a careless air, stepped on Daisy's pretty gown, tearing out a yard or two of gathers! and going on without apparently perceiving what she had done. The girl in question had a very tight waist, tight skirts, so tied in at the knees she could hardly walk straight, very red lips, and curious black linings to her eyelids—"*Revers* to them," as Essie Smeeth said. Her black hair was cropped short, and parted on one side, and her black eyes had flashed a glance—although that must have been the effect of imagination—which made Daisy's soft flesh rather creep, as if it had felt the evil eye.

"I did not know you were such an easily frightened little lady," said Gascoigne, still in his happiest vein, his nose having now assumed quite an air of protectorship, as he looked down on the small partner on his arm, who, with a sigh and some pins, had made the damage right again.

"Well, will you come and sit here below the stairs? It is quite an arboreal retreat—three fuchsias in pots, and one india-rubber plant."

Behind the india-rubber plant in question sat Colonel Burke; behind the fuchsia, Major Hodge; each flirting with a Miss Cox, and each apparently under the ostrich-like belief that their portly forms were hidden by tropical exuberance of leafage. On the stairs sat Pussy Cox, with Captain O'Donoghue stretched by her side, looking up tenderly into her eyes.

The three greatest men-artists in flirtation in Marstown were in very close company.

It was enough to make Daisy think that these were the only specimens of ball-giving British officers, if she had not had a very different example beside her.

"I have got a scratch on my arm," they heard Pussy softly wail. "Don't you pity me?"

"Poor little arm, where is the scratch?" in dulcet tones.

"Here," showing her wrist like a spoilt child (out of her teens).

"You forget that you have a glove on, so how can I see it?"

"Ah! well—there it is," turning back a portion of glove, and showing a tiny scratch, obviously made by a pin.

"Horrible scratch—poor little wrist! Shall I make it well?" in languidest drawl.

"Shall we go into the tea-room?" asked Gascoigne, by this time rising, so as to hear no more eavesdroppings.

Then, as they went, he as suddenly smiled upon Daisy, with some suppressed laughter, but also a positive increase of colour. (Now why should he have felt inclined to blush at showing some especial interest in his companion?) "I heard to-day from two old ladies of somebody else who had a scratched arm. I hope sincerely that the wound is not very dangerous either, since one sees no signs of it."

Daisy smiled bravely, but said nothing. Her wound was bandaged under a long glove; and it did hurt at times, but she said never a word about it. Instead, she began telling Gascoigne of the beginning and end of that famous expedition to market. Gascoigne professed the deepest interest in Galatea, as he christened the dummy, scorning "Aunt Sally," and thinking Miss Black—"well, just a little dangerous; for she might be vexed." There never was anyone whose habit it was so to put himself in the place of others.

And now his promised galop.

"Write it yourself, for my pencil is lost," said Daisy lightly.

"What, are you not afraid of my seeing any of the secrets on this card?"

"Not at all. You may read all the names," with childish joyousness. She felt so utterly, indescribably happy.

Gascoigne slowly read—seven times the name of Lee; silently restored Daisy her card.

She felt as if a cloud had darkened her summer sun. What was the matter? He sat silent. She sat silent.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A lightsome eye, a soldier's mien,
A feather of the blue,
A doublet of the Lincoln green,
No more of me you knew,
My love!
No more of me you knew.

On the sofa near this silent couple, Gascoigne and Daisy, sat the wretched Miss Browne, neglected and more crane-like than ever.

Poor soul! Not very wise at the best of times, she was additionally afflicted with an infatuation for Smiler Lee, although he was much younger than herself; and her rather staring green-gooseberry eyes now followed his every motion painfully, as he flitted round the room, bringing tea—in

order to make no one jealous—to two or three ladies, with jokes for each.

Colonel Dunn, on the other side, was kindly trying to force some wine on a little weary-faced woman, who had evidently once been pretty.

"You know you've got a headache; you own to it. Come—do as the lasses do: say no, but take it." The colonel was Scotch, and very fond of the shrewd sayings of his mother-tongue, which he uttered with a hearty burr of relish.

"What a capital proverb!" said Gascoigne, with one of those slow smiles Daisy had learnt to dread, if directed upon herself. "Do as the lasses do: say no, but—*do it.*"

She was silent, not daring to ask was he—could he—be thinking of her card; longing to explain.

But how could she—when no one asked her to do so?

"Well, thanks, Colonel Dunn. For my own part, I should like to go home soon; but my husband will never come away so early. He likes dances," said the little tired woman with a querulous voice, accepting the wine.

"Who is that lady?" Daisy now hazarded asking Gascoigne, feeling she must say something, and with a most ridiculously timid manner.

"That is Mrs. Burke, the wife of Colonel Burke, whom you saw out there under the stairs."

What—wife of the man who was flirting so busily with Birdie! Though little Miss Dimity said nothing, while her eyes were thus opened, she knew by something in his voice, so fine it could hardly be given a name, that the same thought was in the mind of the quiet man beside her.

But up came Lee towards her gaily—banishing reflection.

Poor Miss Browne rose slowly to intercept him, while her eyes wandered, as it were, over his face with a pitifully foolish gaze.

"You haven't once asked me yet this evening," she whispered solemnly, stopping his way.

"So sorry, Miss Browne. You *will* excuse me, *won't you?* But my card is unfortunately quite full," answered Lee, terribly embarrassed; though of course he never lost his presence of mind.

Miss Browne gave a "green-eyed," despairing look, broke her fan across her knee, and let it drop weakly by her side; then, as he offered his arm to Daisy, anxious to escape, she put up both hands to her face, and burst out crying.

There was consternation amongst those near in the tea-room.

Mrs. Browne bustled up to her daughter, declaring volubly it was "hysterics," "neuralgia," "overcome with heat." Somebody (it was Gascoigne) whispered hastily to Lee he had better get quickly out of the room. There was a cry for smelling-salts—air—a fan.

"Take mine, please," entreated Daisy, thrusting into Gascoigne's hand her pretty ivory and feather fan, and he nodded.

"You'll never see it again; she'll keep it," whispered Essie Smeeth, jumping at Daisy.

"She may," returned the latter heroically, and Lee and Gascoigne looked applause.

The last thing both partners saw was Gascoigne quickly and quietly handing a tumbler of cold water to the agitated group, a thing which nobody else had thought of.

"On with the dance," however!

The string band was going tra-la-la, as if no Miss Browne were sobbing in the next room.

Poor Lee and Daisy felt like culprits; but they agreed, in guilty whispers, it was best to keep on dancing "as if nothing had happened." So, though people began to glance at them as the rumour spread, Lee kept spinning like a wound-up top, till his little partner seemed to see the floor waving up to her, and away from under her, and her heart seemed rising, stopping her breath so that she could not even gasp for mercy.

Lee, between whiles, could talk of nothing but excusing his conscience; so that Daisy, however much she felt he ought to be engrossed by the matter, at last grew secretly very weary of sympathising with the false position in which this much-to-be-pitied, martial Adonis was placed.

The evening's cup of joy now began to taste of the dregs. Captain Gascoigne was no longer "nice to her." Poor Miss Browne was miserable; Daisy began to think she had best be miserable too (in a secret way, of course).

As she was in this dejected mood, the second "handsomest man in the British Army" came for his dance. He puzzled her with a new step—as he took care, with pride, to tell her it was—which seemed to consist in standing still for fully two seconds, and then making a gentle bound! A short succession of these leaps and bounds was soon enough

for Daisy; who was afraid of doing likewise, lest she might bound on his feet.

In the intervals he also insisted on talking of nothing but the Browne episode, which distressed poor Daisy, who felt almost guilty; and was anxious besides to veil the weakness of her sex.

Colonel Burke spoke in small whispers that made him seem ashamed of what he was saying, although he only meant to be insinuating. His sentences always seemed trying to wriggle themselves into one's mind; while he transfixed his partner with a constant gaze of his black orbs, which seemed to answer in his own estimation to "a steady fire upon the enemy."

"So you don't like me to laugh at Miss Browne, he! he!" he softly confided, as if they had a state secret between them; then opening his mouth to laugh in a queer, soundless, equally mysterious way. "But you must acknowledge she is very long in the tooth!"

Now poor Miss Browne was afflicted by nature with teeth, as said a great foreign critic cruelly of Englishwomen in general, much resembling piano keys. But this was not the colonel's meaning.

"Don't you know what I mean? Why, old!—of course. Don't you hate girls when they get to that age? I do. Now anyone can see *you* are only just out," he imparted—with a furtive manner and a clandestine pressure of Miss Dimity's hand against his side, as his eyes tried to stir up the "steady fire" by a murderously-killing glance.

But if this gay Lovelace meant to go up like the rocket in Miss Dimity's estimation, he only succeeded in coming down like the stick. Her blood quite boiled at the insolence of a middle-aged married man—which made it worse!—venturing to press her hand.

"I mean to grow old myself some day," she said, with magnificent dignity, and sailed back to Mrs. Cox's side.

The dance gave her no more pleasure now; only—she strained her eyes to the door. There was one galop yet, that might restore all things to gladness again, if——

It began; it went on! Couples whirled. No partner appeared for Daisy. She began to feel as if the eyes of all the room were upon her, and shrank behind Mrs. Cox to hide the imagined, terrible slight to which she was being so unkindly subjected.

At last, Gascoigne entered the doorway.

Daisy hid closer. She hoped he would not see her at all now, since he had so far neglected her. But in five more seconds she heard his voice overhead (literally); hers being so drooped with the weight of his supposed scorn.

"I think this is the galop you kindly promised me."

Without a breath of reproach, the meekest of small creatures crept out of her retreat and started to dance.

One turn. Captain Gascoigne did not waltz to please the arena so well perhaps as Lee. His dancing was so quiet it could never be conspicuous, but it was none the less easy and *entrainant* for that. As to Daisy, she thought it utterly paradisiacal. There was no terrible strain, knowing the reputation of the best dancer, etc., might be marred by her awkwardness; no feeling that admiring, envious, critical eyes were never off her. (But indeed, if Gascoigne had shuffled blunderingly on her toes, all the time, she would very likely have been almost equally happy while dancing with him. So foolish and illogical is the feminine mind!)

Another turn—and the music stopped.

"Oh! *is* it all over?"

"I am afraid that I came up very late," said Gascoigne, rather stiffly. "But the fact is, poor Mrs. Browne asked me to get her carriage called, so I was sure you would not be annoyed at my doing such a small kindness. Besides, you have danced with a so much better partner than myself—with Mr. Lee—that you will hardly regret not having had a longer turn with me."

Now, surely, was the time to say something. How complimentary, how sweetly, gaily flattering had not Daisy been such a little, little while ago! Nothing came; not a word. Might she not hint now that his step was, like many of his other accomplishments, that of a man

Who can, but seldom cares to shine?

Gascoigne led her back to Mrs. Cox; then, evading that matron's instant artifices to entangle him in conversation (for Mrs. Cox made the most of her opportunities with young men), he said it was late, far later than he had meant to stay; and with a retreating smile, which Mrs. Cox entirely appropriated—indeed its frosty civility would have given no comfort to Daisy—his tall figure stalked away.

Up came Jack at once, to follow his senior's lead.

"Well, little one, you look a wreck. You should be in bed. "I say,"—in a loud confidential whisper—" how have you liked it, eh?"

"O—h! ve-ry much," in a very slow, dubious murmur. "You've never been near me all night, Jack. Do stay a minute now."

"Can't, child. I want to go back with Captain Gascoigne, as I came in his hansom. Why, you didn't want me before; I saw you all right with Lee and the others, you young hypocrite! . . . Cheer up. I'll give you a grand turn, I promise you, at *Our Ball.*"

But in spite of that fraternal recommendation, when Daisy Dimity once more found herself alone in her little room in Magdala Villa, she sat down by the dressing-table, put her head on her arms, and began to cry! Cried after having danced every dance that evening, and having been congratulated on her success, and "chaffed" about Smiler Lee by both the Smeeths and all the Coxes, as they had again reassembled in the ladies' cloak-room. Cried—as if she had never cried before! But as all women know what a relief and almost consolation it is to weep, and that Daisy was one of those soft souls who weep easily, let us hope that by morning she felt all the better of her midnight grief.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Le soldat baille sous la tente,
Le matelot sur le tillac,
Bientôt ils ont l'âme contente,
Avec la pipe de tabac;
Si pourtant survient une belle,
A l'instant le cœur fait tic-tac,
Et l'Amant oublie auprès d'elle
Jusqu'à la pipe de tabac.

It was the day of Mrs. Luxton's picnic up the river.

Three or four boats-full of the party were pulling up the stream; by meadows where the cows grazed knee-deep in buttercups; by cherry orchards round tiny hamlets; by great reed-beds, which the wild ducks haunted in the winter-time.

They had already left the smoky town and its suburbs far behind. All had settled down into their places, forgetting the rubs of starting, the hampers mislaid, the wrong persons who *would* sit beside them.

The day was of a warm, delicious gray, with veiled sun-

shine, that made all Nature—mead, copse, and green woods crowning the heights on either side—seem reposing in that gentle stillness, which lit up the cool depths of the river without merely dazzling on the surface.

It was about three o'clock, for they had not left Marstown until afternoon, meaning to have a five-o'clock dinner, and wait to row back by moonlight. There was one large steam-launch, which held most of the guests. The smaller boats belonged to some of the officers in Marstown, who, dressed as gay as Tom Bowlings for the day, had invited the ladies of the party who were fairest in their eyes, to grace their trim-built wherries.

"You'll come in our boat. I know you would like that best," young Lee had said to Daisy on the pier when starting. He felt rather hurt when she refused; though, since their famous ride his too great ardour for Daisy had imperceptibly cooled. And there was Miss Le Hunt, a "county" beauty, whom, having met only two days ago, he had already begun to admire.

Poor Smiler! He really felt that he loved all his old flames as much as ever; but then he loved the new ones too. It is a hard thing when new friends appear on one's life-horizon, that one cannot have dances enough, and time and opportunities for attention enough, to keep the old friends from feeling thrust out into the cold, and their friendly rights filched by the strangers. Only by slight self-denial, and the remembrance that the sister of his chum had claims above all others, did the Smiler give that invitation with such true genial warmth.

So Daisy would not go with him. No matter. Miss Le Hunt did not hesitate, but sprang into his boat with a will. Lee could not but remember that her father's place, only five miles off, must have good partridge-shooting in September; and, without being inclined to toady any girl for ulterior purposes, he said to himself he dearly loved getting good shooting.

In the large boat Daisy found herself with the Luxtons, Colonel Dunn, the old Misses Silverthorne, and some men. Among these men, at the farther end, stood Gascoigne. (How weary one grows of craning round to glance at a man's figure, that never turns to glance at oneself! Yet how uninteresting is the loveliest river scene compared with the back of a gray tweed suit!) Besides, there were a good many people whom Daisy did not know.

"Who are they?" she asked of Fuzzy, who was amusingly demure, and sat close by her side.

"County, my dear; more or less county. Some of them live in villas near the town, with two acres of demesne and big conservatories. The rest are the real thing—rookeries, damp old houses, mortgages, and a skeleton in the family cupboard apiece. There are no men, hardly, left in the country, so the daughters like to have some of the garrison society like the rest of us poor townspeople. But they are all far above us—in their own estimation. They have mostly all grandfathers and grandmothers; or—if some of the villa people have come from Australia just lately—they have at least 'a grip of the soil,' as the Irish peasantry say."

"But, Fuzzy, what nonsense! Surely you have grandfathers and grandmothers too!"

"Hush, dear, no. Only on our mother's side. Can she hear? She'd be so angry if she did. I do assure you that, except at some omnibus ball, or garrison dance, I've never been asked with any of these people before; and, of course, we owe it to you that Mrs. Luxton did."

So saying, Fuzzy, being in a specially confidential and loving mood, feeling shy of the strangers, gave Daisy's arm a secret hug.

"But," said Daisy, blushing up, "you know my grandfather bought Elm Hall quite lately; and before that he was only——"

"Don't tell me. I don't want to know," exclaimed Fuzzy, stopping her ears. "Why, for worlds I wouldn't burden my conscience with any unwelcome truth that might turn into a fib, when the people here ask me about your family and country seat. My dear, you have 'a grip of the soil,' too—that's enough! Oh, there are plenty of people in Marstown itself—bankers, and lawyers, and doctors—who inherited the highest circles of ready-made clients and so forth from *their* fathers before them, who have all graveyards full of grandfathers that would beat those of the villa people into fits—if ghosts could do such a thing. But, though they know the county people to a certain degree (there are some of them in that boat there), they keep to their own humdrum respectability circle, and don't know *us* new-comers of some years ago. Ha, ha!" with a good-humoured, yet rather vexed laugh. "It is a funny world!"

"I hope that profound philosophical remark was not

meant to be kept a secret, Miss Cox," said Gascoigne's voice close behind, making both the girls start. He and Colonel Dunn were smoking near the boiler; and, the boat being small, a fact both girls had forgotten, one could not well help overhearing, unless one walked overboard. Daisy blushed; Fuzzy laughed louder; both wondering how much had been overheard.

"We were only talking of the cliques and sets that people in Marstown have. Isn't it stuff?"

"Ay, ay! Birth's gude, but breedin's better, as the proverb says," cried the colonel, with a kindly covert glance at Daisy, showing he had heard her confession as to her grandfather. "But where will you go and not find the same thing? In every place I've ever been quartered there were circles within circles, like wheels within wheels."

"Yes, indeed," echoed Gascoigne. "That reminds me of an attempt at a military sermon I once heard at Dover from a young petticoat person, who was discoursing on the helmet of salvation. He said: 'So the helmet, my brethren, looks down on the shako, and the shako looks down on the busby! And—and——' Not remembering what could possibly come after the busby, he got very red—so he ended up, 'Amen,' and fairly fled."

"When I was in Dublin, they called the different sets cream, milk, and buttermilk. I went in for buttermilk," quoth Jack, who had just come up from discoursing the stoker, with a view to practical knowledge.

"Eh, eh, eh! Went in for buttermilk. Come, that's honest. Do you know the Yankee proverb, 'It is not well to *pray* cream and live skim-milk?' When were you there; not with us, eh?" cried the colonel, in his crackling, cheery voice, as if he was letting off ever so many gay little squibs.

"No, sir. It was only when I was in a Militia regiment before passing for the army. We did not do very well at our last inspection; for when one of our captains was ordered to put his company through their drill, someone whispered to the colonel who was inspecting, 'Och, colonel dear, sure Captain Jones and his men are not on *spaking terms!*'"

"Do you remember Dryden's unkind allusion to militia?" smiled Gascoigne, turning aside to Daisy.

> "And raw in fields the rude militia swarms;
> Mouths without hands, maintained at vast expense,
> In peace a charge, in war a weak defence."

Daisy did not know it; but she felt and looked so happy at Gascoigne's having at last addressed her, that he might have been just as well satisfied had not Fuzzy been misguided enough to remember her family rôle. Hitherto she had been comparatively demure, and really more natural; but now she exclaimed, with an effort at smartness:

"Well, how you men do always play 'follow the leader!' If I were sitting alone, now, not one of you would come near me. Oh, often and often I've remarked that of you with other girls. But because one gentleman comes now, here are all three of you." (She quite overlooked the idea that they might have come on Daisy's account.)

"There may be some truth in that remark; but as I do not wish to be accused of acting like a silly sheep, I must take the hint and depart till another time," answered Gascoigne, relapsing into his former gravely courteous air—and the smile that Daisy now did not care for, because it was everybody's. He used to have quite a different one for her.

There! He was gone away after having only spoken once. How tiresome of Fuzzy! Of course it was not *his* fault.

A lump rose in the little girl's throat; and, though she turned her head to gaze over the boat's side at the lovely river-view, she only saw trees waving up and down, though it was a windless day, while the herds of comfortable British cattle seemed grazing in a Scotch mist.

Jack and the colonel were now both busy expatiating on the chances of wild-duck shooting in the back-waters and sedge-beds their boat passed. Engrossed by the charms of this topic, they had forgotten feminine society.

Fuzzy sat pouting at her blandishments having been overlooked.

Daisy, on the contrary, liked men to *be* men, as in her own mind she phrased it; and not drawing-room loungers. Of course, since her stay in Marstown, she had sometimes (especially of late) felt she would dearly have liked to pour all her perplexities into Jack's brotherly ears, no Polly being by. But, after all, so she sighed to herself, he would only tell her she was making herself unhappy about nothing; he could not understand; it was not his fault, only that—

Women are women, men are men.

And only that very morning, such a lovely fan had come for her, without a word of explanation; far more lovely than

the one Mrs. Browne had forgotten to return. A marvel of mother-of-pearl and painted daisies. Now of course it was clear Mr. Lee had sent it; yet she had hoped——

Then she felt a hand softly placed on hers, and Mrs. Luxton's voice kindly said:

"My dear child, you look quite moping. What is the matter?"

"Nothing, indeed; only—only that I have been feeling all the morning that I should not enjoy myself to-day. Have you not got a presentiment of that sometimes?" said poor Daisy weakly.

"Nonsense! When I was a girl, I always found that, whenever I did not expect to have a pleasant time, I always had one; and the contrary when my mind was too much set on anything," said the genial young woman cheerily. "Come—you are my charge to-day, I consider; and I insist on your enjoying yourself. Will you come over with me to the other end? The old Misses Silverthorne are asking for you, and I want to introduce you to all the county girls?"

So said; and so done.

Presently Daisy found herself being introduced to all the people whom it had been since years the ambition of the Coxes to know. Then she was cooed at and caressed by the Misses Silverthorne, who had only that morning dressed her sore arm. These spinsters it was the fashion to pet among the county girls; though aged, they were so sympathising, such "dear old ducks;" the mothers added they "were of such good family." Now, the old ladies related all the particulars of how Daisy had been the saviour of Fido.

"Dear Fido—he is such a *sweet!*" enthusiastically exclaimed the simple, little, second Miss Le Hunt.

"Darling Fido! I could steal that dog," chimed in Miss Normanby, the ill-dressed heiress of Normanby Tower.

"Poor Fido—I loathe lap-dogs, as a rule, but he is a jolly little beast," declared Miss Despard, a handsome, bold gipsy; one of the penniless daughters of Sir Alured Despard, the most blue-blooded baronet in the country.

As they congratulated Daisy on her "awful pluck" and her angelic conduct, Gascoigne, who had been "doing duty" at this end of the boat hitherto with conscientious self-denial (since he so seldom performed such society tasks), felt that his eyes were no longer impelled to wander so enviously to where Jack and the colonel were slaying the wily

mallard in prolonged conversation. Still he sat nearly silent; or conversed almost apart with Miss Patience Silverthorne.

The young ladies, having received Daisy into their high-bred circle, were secretly inclined to consider her "a sweet little thing" (how much for her brother's sake we will not inquire); but regretted to each other that she was staying with people of such dreadfully bad style. By-and-by, apparently paying Daisy the compliment of overlooking her —or else looking on her as one of themselves—they began to converse among themselves.

"Oh dear!" cried Miss Le Hunt, "I feel as if I should like to do something wild to-day. I feel so naughty, naughty!"

"And I feel so baddy, baddy!" echoed Miss Normanby, crescendo.

"And I feel so wickedy, wickedy!" ended Miss Despard, fortissimo.

Then they all laughed at each other's wit.

Daisy opened her eyes most innocently; but then presumed to question in her heart of hearts whether this society was, after all, so infinitely superior to that of the Marstown set among whom she had found herself. Only that these other girls, no one could deny, had a certain something of superiority in their manner, as if feeling sure of their worldly position by birth. Their carriage, that long-forgotten test of a true gentlewoman, was very bad, it is true; but their birth was as a moral backbone to them.

Still, unceremonious manners and witless chaff are the fashion nowadays amongst young ladies. No doubt, had these three been born fifty or sixty years ago, and been dressed in book-muslin gowns and black shoes, they would also have had, as a matter of course, the quieter demeanour of their mothers.

Autre temps, autre mœurs. And, no doubt, to go back further, our grandfathers and grandmothers railed against *their* children as having lost something of the grand air of their day, or, when stiffness became the mode, said their sons were dull dogs, with no sport or jollity in them.

The Marstown young ladies, too, might well plead for themselves that they were, as to behaviour, what the century and surrounding circumstances made them. Was it their fault if gentlemen blamed them for the self-same amusing free-and-easiness of manners for which most sought their society. Surely not altogether! From time immemorial, cynical manhood thus has railed against woman-

kind's frivolity. If women would but choose to form one great league—thus men are wont to say—they could rule the world, and make us and all things better and purer. Women answer, with an equal amount of truth, If men chose, they could make us what they pleased.

And now, whilst the young ladies were still laughing together over their wickedy, wickedy wit! and exclaiming in rallying tones, "Oh, Celia!" "Isn't that like Delia?" and so forth, Daisy, venturing to look across, saw that Captain Gascoigne's eyes were twinkling, and his face becoming somewhat red-brown; just the colour cooks give to the outside of potato pies with a red-hot salamander.

"How do you get on?" whispered Mrs. Luxton, who was here and there amongst the party like an erratic beam of sunshine, brightening all the groups in turn.

"Not very well. I don't know them well enough to understand their jokes, perhaps," returned Daisy, confidentially. "I would much rather, please, talk to you, or the old Misses Silverthorne."

"Well, I was afraid these were hardly your style yet," laughed Mrs. Luxton, low. "I know—for I was brought up in the country like yourself, and never went to school to learn the *argôt* of most schoolgirls. It sometimes makes a wretched outsider feel as if they were talking thieves' patter; though it may be all very united and loving for themselves. . . . No, come, here is a girl a little older, but whom you will like—Miss Goodchild."

She introduced Daisy to a dreamy-looking girl, with good clothes rather ill put on her; her hat frequently slipping down on one side of her head, giving her meantime a rakish air—she sometimes put it straight, but the heavy "Rubens" softly slipped back again.

As soon as Miss Goodchild found that Daisy was a stranger, she tried to make herself agreeable. She began to do Murray's Guide for the river, and then, when the first stiffness of intercourse had vanished (for, though friendly, she was hardly quite at ease at first), she made a few more personal inquiries.

Did Miss Dimity like music, singing, drawing, or books?

Miss Dimity, in her small way, liked them all; giving it truthfully to be understood, however, that, her abilities being no larger than suited the size of her body, the only real gift she possessed was that of appreciation.

"Well, I am very fond of books; really good ones,"

imparted Miss Goodchild, with a rueful air. "Having no sisters, they are my companions; but the other girls laugh at me so if ever I begin to talk about them."

And she glanced at the trio across the boat, who were now sitting holding each other's hands rather in the manner of Miss Kate Greenaway's little damsels—though they were hardly so innocent-looking. Daisy could understand that; and though she was not very book-learned herself, said Polly was—and felt sympathetic.

"Those three were all at school together; they are the same age. I am a little older, and, unfortunately, am the only girl at home. My father always hated the idea of girls going to a boarding-school," went on Miss Goodchild, sighing a little, but not too much, over her loneliness. "So, you see, they always keep together at balls or tennis-parties, and have their own jokes. They are very civil, of course, to me, when I have courage to go near their clique; but still one can't help feeling out in the cold."

Daisy grew still more sympathising; she had a knack of making this feeling of hers felt without using many words about it. So her new companion went on:

"Well, then, you know, one can't tell gentlemen either about the things one really likes—such as the clothing club or visiting the sick villagers; it's not their province to know anything about it. And even the other night at the barrack-dance I was longing to talk to all my partners about the 'Earthly Paradise' that I am just reading; but they would have thought me so '*blue!*' And it is dreadful to be called blue, isn't it?"

"Oh, yes!" answered Daisy, slowly, with profound conviction of that truth; then added, with a sudden impulse: "But I think I know someone who would not have thought you too blue for doing so; someone who likes even us womankind to show the best that is in us."

"No, who? Do tell me! Your brother? I like him very much already; but I am a little afraid of him."

"It is," said Daisy slowly; and she blamed herself for a grudging feeling in her heart, that made her speech so slow. "It is, Captain Gascoigne."

"Ah! I don't know him yet; but then I must get to know him to-day. Yes, I shall tell Mrs. Luxton so. And what a lovely, long afternoon it will be for him and me to have a ta-alk!"

The boat had grounded against the bank, interrupting the last word of Miss Goodchild's sentence. And Colonel Dunn had begun to shout: "Hallo—here we are; here we are! And now everybody must get out!—get out!—get out!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

Upon a simmer's afternoon
A wee afore the sun gaed doun.

Beside the landing-place there was an oak-wood, as noble as any in all broad England; full of charming glades and sequestered walks to ramble in on that summer's day. And through it ran down a stream into the wider river, brawling and babbling between great boulders, one of the many clear becks in those parts with gravelly beds, leaving the stream so pure that the fish seemed like sprites arrowing their way hither and thither. A little above this meeting of the waters was an open grassy space, overarched by monarchs of the wood standing deep in fern; while the grass was short, and sweet with thyme, by banks of which slipped the trout stream, "sliding, gleaming, gliding," as singeth Poet Tennyson. Here it was proclaimed the picnic should be held.

"And now, you young people may all go off. I mean to have the dinner all ready at five o'clock, and before that I wish to see none of your faces," cried Mrs. Luxton gaily. "No demurs, please; no objections. My husband and Colonel Dunn are going to help me; so amuse yourselves! depart! vanish!"

"Ay, ay. Get along. We don't care if we never see any of you again—excepting always the ladies!—the ladies!" cheerily hallooed Colonel Dunn, ending his sentence with an intonation of most abject apology to the fair sex, which he altogether spoilt by a side wink at Gascoigne, adding, with a chuckle, "It's aye gude to be ceevil, as the auld wife said when she curtsied to the deevil!"

"Please let me stay too, Mrs. Luxton. I should like it, oh! so much better than going with the rest," implored Daisy, in a whisper of such sincerity that the merry hostess looked round at her in some wonder.

"As you please; but really are you quite sure you would not rather go with——" And Mrs. Luxton surveyed the departing groups.

There went Smiler Lee, still faithful, for the time! to his

mistress of the day. There again went the Coxes, with Major Hodge, young Jones, and Captain O'Donoghue—to whom Jack had this day relinquished Birdie—with marvellous facility. There went Mrs. Cox, rather nervously keeping near some of the greater ladies; and trying to interpolate some mild remarks upon the scenery, the weather, the foxgloves, into their conversation upon mutual acquaintances—whenever any of them gave the poor woman a chance.

"Indeed, there are none of them with whom I care to go," pleaded Daisy earnestly, looking over where just between wood and river three figures were disappearing; Miss Goodchild walking between Jack and Captain Gascoigne. The latter had just been introduced to her by Mrs. Luxton; and she had eagerly begun to "interview" him, rather too much, perhaps, on her favourite topics; whilst Jack had apparently gone after his friend.

And all three—how unkind!—had utterly forgotten to ask Daisy to join them.

Mrs. Luxton watched the direction of her eyes, but said nothing. So Daisy bravely patted out the cloth on the grass; and as bravely refrained from dropping a single salt tear on the pigeon pies and chicken salads. But by-and-by, when Mrs. Luxton asked her to take down a jelly, still in its china mould, and put it gently to cool by the river-edge in loving company with the champagne bottles—then was the opportunity for solitude and refreshing tears!

Daisy was all alone. Some bushes sheltered her from the observation of those she had just left. She felt like a Naiad;—she would have gladly dissolved in tears, and so been merged in the stream;—and did her best towards that dissolution by lying stretched on the grass above the limpid wavelets, with a willow sighing overhead, and a thicket behind her full of tall foxglove spires and banked with wild strawberries and tiny geraniums, while

> The hot noise of bees
> Lulled the bright flowers.

"Miss Dimity, what is wrong?" asked Gascoigne's voice, with a shocked sound, above her, in the midst of a small gush of sobs.

Daisy was so startled she sat bolt upright; then, with one swift glance, hid her weeping blue eyes and quivering face in a friendly tuft of water-mint.

"I—I . . . Nothing," she murmured, choking back her sobs. Then, with catching breath, plucking bravely at

the mint, and pretending to put it to her nostrils with intense relish; though it smelt worse than even old wives' peppermint in church. "I have only—*been enjoying myself alone!*"

Did her ears deceive her, or was there the faintest sound like the beginning of a laugh overhead, instantly checked?

"Is it not rather unkind to prefer enjoying yourself alone; when surely your friends would be only too glad to be allowed to share your—your feelings?"

"Jack, and Miss Goodchild, and all of you went away, and never even thought of me," breaking down at that remembrance again (though inaudibly, and, as she hoped, secretly), and having surreptitious recourse to her handkerchief.

"Stop, please, Miss Dimity; now that just shows how little you know about it," interrupted Gascoigne, pained for her, but really roused to defend himself. "So far from that being the case, I thought all the time that you were walking with Mr. Lee; and when we met him and Miss Le Hunt at some cross-paths, and that no one knew anything of you, I turned back here to see what had become of you."

"No—really?"

"Yes, I did."

"How good of you!"

This last assertion Gascoigne was apparently too modest to echo, yet too honest to contradict. So they both looked at each other with beaming eyes, and an air of extreme mutual satisfaction.

"Mr. Lee . . . indeed! So you thought I had gone with him. That only shows how little you know about what you were talking of," went on Daisy, with a sweet scoff born of great joy, and a little air of reprimand quite new to her.

"Well, how could anyone tell?" returned Gascoigne, with humble happiness. "Certainly, judging from last night at the dance——"

"Oh! what does it matter whom one dances with?" cried Daisy. "He had his name put down on my card, before ever I knew—I was so vexed afterwards."

"Really!" with ecstasy, but shyly dibbling holes in the ground with his stick. "Then—then you are not grieved to the heart, at his having first rowed Miss Le Hunt and then gone walking with her?"

"He asked me to go in his boat first, but I refused," quoth Daisy blandly, unconscious of the real feelings of the Smiler on that occasion; but then, struck by some ink-

ling of his view of the case, hastily added: "however, he really did not want me to go afterwards for a walk. He seems so much smitten with Miss Le Hunt; he told me so. He is always admiring someone fresh, I do believe; he has told me of so many girls he thought charming, one after another."

"Fickle Mr. Lee. He might sing:

> If I by miracle can be
> This livelong minute true to thee,
> 'Tis all that Heaven allows.

And so he makes you the confidante of his loves. What a delightful idea!"

On which Captain Gascoigne, who was by this time sitting on the thymy grass at Miss Dimity's feet, laughed heartily. And little Miss Dimity, who had quite recovered herself and her upright position, laughed too.

Her hands smelt so nastily of mint, she now must needs go down three paces to the stream and wash them. And Gascoigne, with a lazy groan, must needs drag his lazy length thus far—not to forsake her again.

There was a little break in the bank where she stooped down. The wavelets washed over gleaming gravel; mid-stream there was a tiny rush of eddying water, but yet the rippling tide was clear and shallow, no deeper than your knee.

Behind the sitting couple was a thicket, beyond this deep glade. Right and left the sheltering woods stretched up their green, wide-spreading heads to the summer sun, while underneath their stems made cool, cathedral vistas. Opposite, across the water, an oak coppice, broken by faggot piles and cleared spaces, sloped gently upwards. But beyond this, here and there, by help of dips and hollows, could be seen some tiny, distant views of a farther world; some hills, a spire or two.

"How lovely summer is!" uttered Daisy, looking up the rushing river; and at the green glory of the trees, with the tender gleams of evening sun lying on the coppice; and the widely, kindly aspect of the illimitable sky.

"There is a ford here," quoth Gascoigne irrelevantly; "I wish I had known that last winter during the hunting season. It once would have spared me a long ride round.

> The track winds down to the cool stream
> To cross the sparkling shallows; there
> The cattle love to gather on their way——

Miss Dimity, why do you let me quote poetry? What a prig you must think me! You should stop me at once."

"But I like it. Why—do you not do so with other people?" opening her eyes.

"No; you are the only person with whom I so far forget myself, now, as to talk just as I am lazily thinking."

"The only one—now," repeated Daisy, adding with mock jealousy, secretly real: "then there *was* someone else!"

Gascoigne looked closely at her.

"There was—my little sister, now dead; with whom I used to sit by just such another river and talk as idly long ago."

A few moments of silence; then Daisy said:

"Is it not a curious feeling one sometimes has, of seeming to remember what one can have never heard or seen before? This is not the first time I have had it—and especially lately with you."

"Are we affinities, then? Did we live before now together in some bright, particular star, and have only met again 'not in entire forgetfulness?'" smiled Gascoigne. "But ought we not to be going back to join the rest? It is best, I believe, for young ladies not to be conspicuous by their absence on these occasions."

They rose, and were about returning—when, with an air of haste and extreme solicitude, Mrs. Luxton confronted them.

"Where are my jellies—and the champagne, Captain Gascoigne, that I sent you for *ever* so long ago?"

A guilty start; utter confusion; then laughter and evasive apologies.

"They are still cooling in the water. . . . They are reposing in the silver streamlet to the very uttermost moment."

"They are lost and weltering in the flood!" returned the indignant dame, laughing heartily as she ran down to rescue the cherished juice of France's fair province. "In plain English, you both forgot them!"

Then the feasting began. It needs not be told with detail how all the ladies sat round the cloth or rested their plates on friendly hampers, whilst the gentlemen, by waiting upon them, got in each other's way. How the champagne corks popped and the wine-glasses frothed, propped up in the grass at infinite peril of being upset. How everybody would eat of one especial chicken-pie discovered to be the best, and despised cold duck and flouted pressed beef, but revelled in lobster salad, and began to feel sated over goose-

berry tart. How the missing couples that slowly dropped in last were furtively eyed, and commented on with whispers. Then a lull came; and plainly the feasting was over; except for the servants and boatmen, who, the lions of the party being fed, were now like the little jackals coming to pick the bones of the feast.

And by-and-by again the party began to break up into twos and threes; again they showed inclinations of wandering far from the madding crowd; of loving to stroll in sweet solitude.

"You have seen nothing of the beauties of the wood, and up the river-bank as yet. May I offer myself as guide, in case you can find no better one?" Gascoigne had said to Daisy, with an air of would-be doubt, which a smile of inward confidence contradicted.

As if it were possible to find a better! Daisy's heart had eagerly cried out; but she only demurely dropped her eyes, and said she would be very glad if Captain Gascoigne liked to show her the way.

Jack had given her a look of broad, brotherly inquiry, a rallying grin, with a side-glance of unnecessary pity towards the Smiler. Daisy firmly resisted the enticement to confidence of these blandishments, and tried to look as if nothing particular had been proposed; while her cheeks grew red-tinged as her namesake's, and her heart and her feet almost danced as she quietly went after the rest—but side by side with Gascoigne.

Along wood-paths, and up the river's edge they two wandered. They went and they went

> Through the broad, gray lawns,
> As down the red sun sank.

And what they talked about they could have hardly told, or known later; excepting this, that while they talked they had been very happy. Although a man and fair maiden, with thoughts of each other that either would have given much, very much to know! their talk could hardly have been more innocent of coquetry or passion had they been two children wandering hand in hand. Until at last, having crossed the stream higher up by a bridge, they strolled back on the farther side; and then sought to recross it again at a spot where there were some large stepping-stones.

CHAPTER XXX.

"Oh, Hercules!" cried Xenophon, "what wonderful consequences you attribute to a kiss!"

"Do you marvel at my doing so?" inquired Socrates. "And do you not know," he continued, "that the tarantula, although in size it is not so large as a farthing, yet, if its mouth only just comes in contact with a man, it wears him out with pain, and drives him out of his senses?"—*Memoirs of Socrates*—Xenophon's "*Memorabilia.*"

The water, though shallow, was swift and sparkling; and the stepping-stones were wet with spray.

Gascoigne crossed them first, and turning at each stone to hold out a hand to his little companion, said, in warning:

"They are slippery; take care! How the rest would laugh at us if we were to get wet! Steady!—Miss Dimity, I shall scold most tremendously if you slip."

He gained the bank himself now, and held out both hands. Daisy was on the last stone; but the edge of the bank was wettest and most slippery of all, so she eyed it doubtingly—fearingly.

A spring at last; but, with a faint heart, not far enough, so she lit on treacherous surface, and, though Gascoigne had caught her, her feet began sliding downwards. Before, however, her shoe had almost touched the water, before more than the sole of her foot was wet, she was lifted up in two strong arms on firm ground.

Did Gascoigne scold as he threatened? Did he remember Mrs. Grundy?

Instead, it seemed to them both, however foreign to his quiet nature, and extraordinary to relate, that on the moment's impulse he kissed Daisy.

It was so sudden, so extraordinary, such a surprise to them both, that it seemed like a dream. The whole walk had been dreamlike; but this strangest of all!

As if in a dream, too, some distant noise startled them, and Daisy seemed to slip from his hold as if he had only grasped at a little sunbeam quivering on water.

> Like a fawn dost thou fly from me, Chloë,
> Like a fawn that, astray on the hill-tops,
> Her shy mother misses and seeks,
> Vaguely scared by the breeze and the forest.

Verily the maidens in the days of Horace, although the daughters of so stern a race, were not so different, after all, from these of nowadays. What was that noise—that terrible

noise? A woodpecker tapping a hollow tree. Only that—but the old poet's description of virginal shyness still resembled Daisy's newborn alarm.

> Shudders spring, newly-born through quick leaflets?
> Slips the green lizard, stirring a bramble?
> She is seized with a panic of fear,
> And her knees and her heart are one tremble.

Seeing her thus looking startled, like an innocent child, Gascoigne did not speak, as if afraid of alarming her. He seemed too surprised with himself, indeed; although his face wore a most beatific expression, as he looked down on Daisy, who in turn looked lower still on the ground. Then they found themselves walking again demurely back, side by side.

Almost immediately they both heard the rest of the belated merry-makers returning by a nearing path; their voices sounding louder and louder.

It was but a few mere instants since they two had left the crossing-stones.

It seemed as if Gascoigne just then was preparing to speak—to say something; as if Daisy were venturing to lift her happy, frightened eyelids.

Too late! In another moment the rush of talk, and questions, and gay chatter of the rest seemed to surround and overflow them; but then they two felt like dream-people, quite unfit for common talk.

"Where have you been?" asked Miss Goodchild, coming up, and linking her arm quite affectionately through Daisy's, to draw her apart. "Your brother and I have had such a delightful walk—we were wishing so to have you with us, but we forgot to look round for you till we had gone nearly a mile. We had what I call a really good talk; he is so appreciative, your brother, though he may not have a creative mind. Of course all men ought to be creative in intellect, and women receptive; but there must be exceptions, must there not? and I do so love originating my own plans for our village people, and making my own sketches and my embroidery designs, and thinking my own thoughts. Even sometimes I try setting hackneyed songs to my own little compositions; do you ever try that?"

"No," said Daisy humbly, feeling still rather in a whirl. "I am not clever, like you; I never thought of anything new in my life."

"Ah! but that only shows you are intensely feminine; quite a true woman-type. It is so refreshing to meet people whom Nature has made typical, for so often she merges her grand boundary-lines, and reverses her attributes, as for instance your brother and myself." (Daisy mutely looked up surprised, for Jack had always been to her and Polly the type of all that was manly; whilst really Miss Goodchild now—if she would not let her hat slip so rakishly to one side—had most dreamy eyes, and the face of a gentle enthusiast, with nothing strong-minded there.) "I gave your brother a fresh lesson in geology this afternoon," went on Miss Goodchild cheerily, who, once mounted on her hobby, which was Jack at present, gave it a rousing gallop before she got off. I have only learnt the rudiments myself, but nothing is more improving than to teach another person; and, as I say, he *was* so appreciative."

"Geology!" uttered Daisy softly, waking up to a sense of everyday matters again. "Why, Jack passed first for it in some terrible examination. He may not have many accomplishments, such as singing or drawing, but that he does know thoroughly."

"*You don't say so!*" said poor Una Goodchild, thoroughly crestfallen.

Now the indefatigable Mrs. Luxton called everyone to drink the tea which she had been preparing gipsy-fashion; having lit a fire of brushwood, and ranged the tea-cups on a fallen log. Her husband was sitting on his heels beside the embers, keeping the latter alight with most patient assiduity. His attributes, as Miss Goodchild would say, were that he seldom spoke, but when he did it was always to the purpose; he was never "in the way, but never out of the way when wanted," as on this occasion; and, though he liked his own wife's company exceedingly, as a general rule he so greatly preferred that of his own sex to hers, that he never could be brought to talk to a single other lady—unless Mrs. Luxton played him the unkind trick of imploring him to "do duty" with the dowagers she wished to get rid of.

There was a great pile of barked trees near the fire, and to this Daisy had been drawn by her new friend, and made to sit down, whilst her eyes were wandering, wandering—but then Captain Gascoigne had said, "*I will bring you some tea;*" he himself would carry her tea, while Jack, in a humbler degree, was waiting on Miss Goodchild.

If anyone else had said those words they would have seemed most unimportant! but in a man like him!—and then that little but thrilling accent on the "you!"

"How utterly consummately happy you do look! What does make you smile so to yourself?" suddenly asked Una Goodchild, with an embarrassingly clear, yet mentally obtuse gaze.

On the other side of the logs, while Daisy blushed and looked silently down, voices were now heard. Easy enough to tell whose voices.

"None of your moonlight scenes in a small boat for me—haw, haw," laughed the corpulent tones of the gallant Hodge. "Those woods were near enough playing the mischief with this child. No, no; thank ye."

"I think it will be—aw—dangerous to my health to be out so late on the rivaw. Besides, it will be awfully slow work in that launch, in every way. It is only a mile from here to the Marstown Junction, and, if we catch the down express, we shall have time for a game of whist to-night," languidly drawled Captain O'Donoghue.

"I'm your man, too," struck in the deep low voice of young Jones. "You see I must be back early on account of *duty*."

"Capital! Ha, ha, excellent!" cried the rest. "We'll all regret leaving the rest of the party; but we are obliged to go back early on account of *duty*." So saying, they stalked away, and Daisy and her new friend looked at each other.

"Are not all men horrid?" emphatically ejaculated the latter.

"Well, really——" began the dubious Daisy, quite grieved for the baseness of mankind.

"Will you have some tea?" asked Jack and Gascoigne, at the same moment, of both girls.

So the recreant warriors were seen to depart with much unspoken sorrow on the part of the Misses Cox, and some murmured displeasure on the part of Mrs. Luxton.

"I hate men breaking up a party like that," she said vindictively, aside to Smiler Lee. "Why did they come, if they did not like it; I'm sure I did not particularly want them of all others."

"Cheer up, Mrs. Luxton; I am not going to desert you, any way," cried the ever-joyous little Smiler, in his kindliest

way, quite sorry she or anyone should be vexed. And he kept his word. The steam-launch was got ready, the little boats fastened behind to be towed, for all meant to go back together; and now, putting aside nobly all personal considerations, the Smiler set himself in the midst of all the county girls, and of the Coxes, too—midmost betwixt town and country—as if to atone in his own person for the desertion of his comrades.

The boat was too crowded going back for Gascoigne and Daisy to have any more private speech; but there could be unspoken sympathetic gladness and occasional furtive looks, revealing each other's eyes full of unusual light as, with an air of utter accident, they found themselves seated side by side.

How guilty both happy people felt of being self-surrounded by an atmosphere of love, whilst trying to look round at everyone else with an assumption of utter ignorance of any such feeling! How both secretly hoped their inward feelings might escape all observation of the cold outside world!

So the boat went on, as the evening sunshine faded into rosy grayness; and the water slipped and flowed around and on with them; and the moon began to show faint but ever clearer gleams on wood and river.

The young ladies were now all surrounding and gazing at Smiler Lee like sunflowers turning to the sun, and he was at the highest heaven of his day's journey; beaming on all, emitting small jokes so gaily and constantly, he seemed a perfect funny mitrailleuse.

Under cover of this, as of the darkness in a wooded bend of the river through which their boat was passing, no one heard Gerald Gascoigne and Daisy softly beginning to speak—at last!

"You have enjoyed this day, have you—or not?" he asked, beginning in a tone of pretty certain joyous confidence that she had—tempered by a second thought of more doubting humility.

"Oh, very, very much indeed," in the very smallest of answering voices.

"Do you remember when I found you enjoying yourself alone?"

To this the only answer was shamed silence.

"And when shall I see you again? Do you know that I must be going away to-morrow?" went on Gascoigne, in

a sort of protectingly fond whisper, which in everyday life he would hardly have recognised as his very own.

A little movement like a start came on this.

"Going away!" Daisy just murmured, feeling much as if he had said, "I am sentenced to be transported for life, and you shall never see me any more!"

"It is only for five days, though," went on the young man, unconsciously assuming a consolatory tone of voice, whether for himself or her was not clear. "I cannot well help it. You see an uncle of mine has asked me to go and have some fishing, so I wrote and accepted. If I had known —I almost think I should have put it off."

If he had known what? But perhaps we must not inquire too particularly into this sentence, which seemed intelligible enough to the two persons most interested; though indistinctly thought—uttered so low that how Daisy heard it was miraculous.

"Must you go—now?" with weak hope clinging to a straw.

"I *said* I would." (Paramount reason in a man's mind for doing so.) A kindly glance of manly allowance for feminine feebleness meanwhile turned upon the invisible pleader. Most of the force of this glance was lost in the darkness; only the tone of that newly-dear voice, the outline of that heroic, handsome head—ah, how could it ever have seemed almost commonplace?—discernible in the warm gloom.

"Well, never mind!" and Daisy felt her fingers just lightly touched a moment, as Gascoigne cheerily uttered: "at all events, I shall be back in time for *Our Ball.*"

"And I go home the day after it."

Was it possible—a few days ago would it not have seemed most utterly impossible—that going home to dear Elm Hall should be spoken of in such a smallest of slight tones, with a dismallest heart-sinking not, however, at all revealed by the voice?

"The day after! Oh! well, then, at least we shall have our last dance together."

This was said with almost a cruel tone of joyous confidence; ignoring her small bruised feelings, her quick fears, and budding, crushed, unspeakable hopes. How like a man!—how very, very like a man!

"Hallo, Daisy! are you deaf? I have been shouting at you for the last half-hour," broke in Jack's voice, cheerily

and rudely healthy, void of all moonlight sentiment. "What was it that they say tramps upstairs at night at Elm Hall? Here are the Misses Silverthorne want to know."

"We want to know, my dear," began the two little ancient spinsters, slightly agitated and speaking together, though afterwards they helped each other out with alternate bits of the sentence, "because your brother has just mentioned that your home is in Royalshire. So we are very much interested in hearing that," took up the other. "For *our* old home, too, used to be there," went on both together; and then they fell back into chirping antiphony again. "And your brother has just been telling us of a tradition in your family that a footstep is heard going upstairs in your home at midnight—which is most curious, because the same thing used to be believed or said by the servants in our old home."

"The footstep is supposed to be that of a former servant in the house—an old man who drowned himself in a fit of anger, brought on by eating stewed eels, and because his wife, the cook, would not give him any more," quietly answered Daisy. An exclamation of astonishment broke from both the little old ladies, and then both held up their hands.

"How strange!—how extraordinary! Why, that is the very tale that used to be told of our old home, Thornvale. It was bought by a Mr. Joyce—did you ever hear of him, my dear?—and then we heard it had passed out of his hands. But having no friends left in the county, we have not heard of our old home for thirty years," ended both, in tones of sadness.

"Joyce! Why, that was the name of my grandfather—my mother's father—partner of my other grandfather. He bought Elm Hall first, and then we came in for it," bluntly interposed Jack, relating this family history in an off-hand way.

"Thornvale!" ejaculated Daisy. "Why, that is—that was the very name of our Elm Hall before grandfather changed it long ago."

The two Misses Silverthorne drew out their laced, large handkerchiefs with very trembling hands, and with still greater agitation of mind. Then they said both together, in tremulous tones:

"So it is you who are living in our old home. And, sister, she saved Fido's life; and we never knew who you really were."

Cr-r-r! Wh-i-r-r! The boat had suddenly stopped midstream, and its steam was all puffing in vain.

"Hullo! Stuck in the mud!" cried the gentlemen.

"Back her! Do this—that—or the other with her!" cried the old pilot, and the somewhat beer-bewildered boatmen, and the hot stoker. But though all of male kind ran hither and thither, worked, fumed, suggested, contradicted each other, and felt brief attacks of suppressed "strong Saxon," the fact, nevertheless, became plain—they were aground on a mud-bank.

Now what was to be done?

It soon became equally plain that nothing could be done, except that hardest of many things—have patience and keep one's temper. In two hours at most the tide (for this was a tidal river) would float them again; meantime they could still comfort themselves with tea or stronger brews made hot by the help of the boiler. They all determined to be good-humoured.

And then, having been led insensibly into this vein of thought by Daisy's story of Elm Hall—or being swayed thereto by the influences of night, moonlight, and all the mysteries of nature around them that must be known to running river and nobly ancient woods—some of the party began to talk of ghosts, foremost among these Una Goodchild.

CHAPTER XXXI.

How gently rock yon poplars high
Against the reach of primrose sky,
With heaven's pale candles stored!

Miss Goodchild was a ghost-fancier. No one could be more earnest and eager a young connoisseur in, and collector of, bogie tales, wraiths, double-gangers, and prophetic dreams; supported at present by Mrs. Luxton, who had a great deal of volatile sympathy. The men, of course, scoffed a little, but were willing enough to listen. So they all discussed lightly the famous ghost stories that everybody knows, the Beresford ghost; the monk who appeared to a late eminent church dignitary on account of a confession once betrayed; the curses which cling to some titles like disagreeable heirlooms, and so forth. But everyone seemed shy of telling a [illegible]y themselves, till Miss Goodchild, who, though generally [illegible]sive, became excitable when her favourite topics were [illegible]erned, offered to take the lead and was loudly applauded; [illegible]Dimity giving the signal for acclamations, since he [illegible]her pluck.

Meanwhile the three county girl-friends sat together in a whispering group, wondering that Una Goodchild should always say and do things unlike themselves; which was their way of accusing her of the sin of originality. The Coxes on the other side formed a family group, somewhat dashed by the apparent disinclination to familiarity of the county set, however polite in a distant way were the mothers.

"Now, my story is strictly true," began Miss Goodchild.

"Oh, of course!" chimed in all the listeners, especially the gentlemen, with some malicious intonations.

"It was told me by my grandmother, who was French, the daughter of a refugee nobleman," went on the young lady, "and she told it of her grandfather—no, no, I mean her grand-uncle."

"No matter," kindly interposed the male chorus. "You need not be so particular."

Faithfulness of repetition in such details being, however, the great pride of ghost-fanciers, Miss Goodchild eyed them all with some severity of suspicion; but then started.

"My grand-uncle had been sent away from home when a child, on his mother's death, and brought up at school in Paris. His father, a count, lived in the country, and seemed never to wish to have the boy home for his holidays. At last, when the young man came of age, he received an invitation from his father to go down and see him at their old château, to transact some necessary business. The young man looked upon his father as a hermit and a misanthrope; so went with feelings of some awe and natural curiosity, but very few anticipations of pleasure in the coming interview. However, he was well enough received by the count in the gloomy old home, and advised to go early to rest.

"During the night the young man awoke; and by the light of the moon was horrified to see a female figure standing at the foot of his bed looking fixedly at him. This apparition had such an effect upon his nerves that he could only utter, while grasping a pistol under his pillow: 'Who are you? Speak, or I fire.' The spectral vision slowly shook its head with an air of intense woe; but raised its hand to its mouth once, twice, thrice! still remaining mute. The young man's nerves were overstrained by the effects of his long journey, the strangeness of his meeting with his father after a separation so long wondered at, and the influence of this gruesome presence, so seemingly supernatural; he lost his senses and

fainted. When morning came, he found himself still in bed; and no trace was to be found in his suite of rooms of the ghostly midnight visitor. However, requesting to see his father, he humbly asked leave to quit the house, feeling still ill—and related what he had seen. The father, who had at first seemed only suspicious and annoyed at such a request, became, on hearing of the ghost, extremely angry. He laid solemn commands upon his son never again to breathe to human being such a nonsensical story about his house; and in great displeasure desired him certainly to leave the château at once, but not to presume to return without permission. The son was so disagreeably affected by the midnight apparition, and his father's strange displeasure on hearing the story, that he took the latter at his word—and went away. He never returned again until news came to him of the old count's death. Then it became necessary to go home and arrange matters.

"He found the château in much disorder; for the servant who principally attended on his father in his gloomy solitude had disappeared soon after his death, having plundered the château of much that was valuable. Aided by the bailiff, however, the young count began putting matters to rights, and having chosen a different room from that used by him on his last visit, saw no spectre to his great relief; and next morning he began looking over the household accounts.

"In these he was struck by the frequent entry, *Tant pour la femme du petit appartement* (So much for the lady in the little room!) Strange! What could it mean?

"Inquiries brought out the confession from some of the dependents that they had long suspected someone was concealed in the house. Search was at once diligently made. And then a locked door was found concealed in the wainscot in the last of that suite of apartments in which the young man had seen the ghost. They forced this door; and found to their horror in the inner room a woman's corpse only lately lifeless, in which the young man recognised his midnight vision!

"He was still more shocked when, upon further inquiries, it was found that this had been actually the countess, his mother—long since supposed to be dead. His father, in a fit of jealousy, had immured her here after having cut out her tongue; this last accounted for her powerlessness to speak on that night when she must with difficulty have made her way to the bedside of her only son.

"In the interval between the old count's death and the arrival of the young one, the servant entrusted with her care had robbed the house and taken flight. The poor woman, left shut up, was starved to death!"

"Bravo, Miss Goodchild!" exclaimed Colonel Dunn, after a short pause following this recital—whilst he rubbed his old cropped head till it seemed likely that electric sparks would be seen issuing from the tips of each hair, so highly was he charged with impatient excitability—"well, you do tell a good ghastly one when you begin; I will say that!"

Said Captain Luxton, who was a very quiet man, with a very quiet voice, but very twinkling eyes:

"It seems to me that Miss Goodchild's own story tells against her theory. The young man thought, like everybody else, he saw a ghost—and he was mistaken."

"Now, Harry, do hold your tongue," exclaimed his wife, whilst the fair preacher of ghostology looked rather disconcerted. "There are plenty of true stories, as all the world knows, of real ghosts. Why should people have ever believed in them, if there were none? Answer me that."

"Yes, yes; of course mine was not a regular ghost story; but there are plenty of *true* ones," said poor Una Goodchild, looking thankfully at her ally. "I have even thought of collecting all the authentic ones told me by friends, and publishing them like 'The Night Side of Nature.'" (Publishing! such an idea—as if she could! was expressed by slight shrugs of the shoulders of the fair county clique.)

"Pray do; and call it the new 'Noctes Ambrosianæ,'" suggested Gascoigne cheerfully.

The gentlemen would treat the subject with veiled derision, not at all shared by the weaker sex. But immediately afterwards, afraid he might have vexed her, Gascoigne added:

"I do believe, though, in the strong effects of imagination. For instance, a lady who was staying at my home last winter was fond of collecting curiosities; and someone gave her the hand of a mummy, which she showed me with the greatest delight as a new toy. Next morning she came downstairs looking very pale. She told me then she had dreamt that a beautiful, black-haired woman, wearing a long veil and dressed in white, came and stood by her side—and, in a low voice as if from far away, said: 'Give back my hand! Give me back my hand!' holding out a bleeding wrist. I told her it was her own imagination; advised

her not to give up possession. However, next time she dreamed the same thing. And the following morning, in desperation, she resolved not to face a third such night, and begged me to take a present of the hand—so I did."

"And what did you see next night?" asked everyone, on tiptoe of expectation as the speaker paused.

Said Gascoigne, modestly, though his nose raised itself with an air of enjoyment that was really irritating:

"I saw nothing."

"Nothing!—But did you keep it long? Did you give it a fair chance?" cried the disappointed ones.

"I kept it in my room for weeks, and have it still. What more could I do?" meekly asked the hardened heretic.

"Ah, well! your lady friend had the gift of second sight; but you must have too material an organisation," meditatively observed Miss Goodchild, settling the matter thus to her own entire satisfaction.

"Jack, do tell your one; you know—the horrible story," Daisy softly urged her brother. Jack gave an honest growl, intimating no stepping before the public for him—thank you!

"What's that little Miss Dimity says?" cried Colonel Dunn, however; getting more excited and delighted as each fresh person was entrapped into story-telling, so long as he himself was spared. "Come on, man; come on!" as young Dimity still muttered sounds of evasion, which seemed to come from as far away as those of the Egyptian lady. "Let us hear your tale, too. Is your brother scolding you for betraying him, Miss Dimity, eh? . . . Tell him, 'Better speak bauldly out, than aye be grumplin'!'" And the Colonel rubbed his hands gleefully, as if they had no more feeling than dry sticks, and, like Captain Cook's savages, he was trying to bring fire out of them.

Thus adjured, Jack began in the deep bass voice that almost startled people—considering his rather inconsiderable size: "Well! I heard this when I was in a Militia regiment trying to pass for my commission for the army. Some of the fellows remembered the colonel and the other two men it happened to; but they were before my time. The story is, when the regiment was out training, the colonel, a captain, and one of the young officers were asked out to dine at a country house. During the dinner the colonel, who had taken in the lady of the house, remarked that his subaltern kept looking at their

hostess in a curious way, and very frequently. He kept on doing this more and more—till after dinner, when they were again in the drawing-room, it seemed as if he could not take his eyes off the lady, for wherever she moved he watched her, as if he were fascinated. The colonel frowned at him, tried to catch his eye, but all in vain. At last being thoroughly annoyed, and afraid the young fellow's excessive rudeness must be remarked, the colonel took his leave very early—so, as the other two had come in his carriage, they were obliged to go with him. In the carriage he told his captain why he had left, saying to the youngster: 'How could you stare any lady so out of countenance? I never was more annoyed in my life.' 'Well, sir,' said the other, 'if you saw what I did, I only wonder you did not stare too. Did you not see something very shocking?' 'No,' said the colonel. 'What did you see?' 'I saw a devilish figure behind Mrs. —— all the time, and it seemed trying to cut her throat!' Well! of course neither the colonel nor the other man could believe the young one was in his right senses at this; so they concluded he had taken too much champagne, when they heard the gallop of a horse behind them, and, looking out, recognised one of the servants from the house they had just left. They called out to ask what was the matter. 'I am going as fast as I can for the doctor,' said the man. 'My mistress has just cut her throat!'"

Jack's story created a slight sensation; the ladies felt a disagreeable thrill.

A change for the brighter was wanted, when old Miss Prudence Silverthorne, the eldest, began, in a high, chirping voice: "Now, do let me tell you a quite different ghost story, which happened to myself and my sister Patience. May I?"

Might she? There was a cheeriness about her tone that made the men believe she would be rational, while there was also an air of sincerity impressing true believers with faith in her earnestness of purpose. They hailed the offer; and the old lady, pluming herself something after the manner of a bird, thus began:

"In my young days, Patience and I were once invited up to stay in the south of Scotland, for a large ball and other festivities, to be given in honour of the heir of the house having come of age. Something, I forget now what, seemed likely to prevent us, so we wrote with regret and refused.

"It happened, however, in a day or two that the obstacle

was removed; and, since these people were great friends of ours, my sister and I thought we might venture still to use their invitation; so we wrote accordingly, and started on our journey before we could get any letter in return.

"There was no telegraph in those days, remember.

"Well, it seems some other friends had been asked to fill our places meanwhile; so there was a difficulty about finding us room, which we, being young and foolish, had never contemplated. The house was crammed to overflowing.

"'They must have the small breakfast-room,' our kind hostess at last said. 'While there is such a large party we must breakfast, of course, in the dining-room.' So that was settled. But then arose a question—as we afterwards learnt—as to our bed; for not a spare one was to be had in the house, and, we being expected that evening, there was no time to hire one from the nearest town, which was at some distance.

"At last the housekeeper remembered an ancient four-post bed, which had been discarded to the lumber-room since ages. It was a handsome old bed, with carved posts, and a green velvet canopy overhead, covered with dust, and nodding plumes, that gave it a strange resemblance to a hearse. However, when they brought this with difficulty downstairs, it was found that it would hardly fit into the breakfast-room. For the latter was one of the oldest rooms in the house, dating from the days of the border fortresses, and had immensely thick walls, and a low, groined ceiling; so that the only spot in which our bed could be put upright was in the middle of the room—which gave it a singular appearance, even more solemn and bier-like than before.

"Nevertheless, when we arrived and found what pains they had all been at to make us comfortable, we naturally expressed the utmost satisfaction and delight with all the arrangements made for us. And though poor Patience whispered to me that the bed made her think someone might have been murdered in it, I praised its gloomy grandeur to the housekeeper.

"Anyhow, there was no time for qualms, since that night the great ball took place, at which we danced till we were tired out, and only went to bed not long before cockcrow.

"We had not long been in bed, and the house was very still, when, as I lay between sleeping and waking, I felt Patience touch me, and at the same time heard the handle of the door softly turned.

"Now—as you all very well know—one's first impulse in such a case is either to call out in a hurry or else to hold one's breath and lie still very frightened. And this last is exactly what we did.

"Soft, small footsteps approached the bed. As well as one could judge in thick darkness, they seemed unlike the steps of man or woman, not heavy enough for the one, more pattering than those of the other, and therefore still more uncanny.

"They paused beside us in silence. There was a cold gust of air; then something seemed to pass before our faces with a wave and fluttering as of wings, immediately after which all came over the bed a quick, soft pattering, as it were. Next the steps receded noiselessly, and we were left trembling.

"Now I do not say that we were either courageous or cowardly; judge for yourselves.

"All I knew well was that we were so far from any other living inmates of that great old house no calls for help would have been heard by them; so, as screaming was useless, I refrained. Besides, I had once heard a woman screaming, and it seemed to me such an unseemly sound, that, if the *thing* had even attempted to strangle us, struggling in silence seemed preferable."

"Ah! but then you are so courageous, Prudence," broke in her sister. "She may say she is not; but she has the most marvellous endurance. *I* should have given a piercing scream, but that my throat seemed choked."

"Well, I may have endurance," went on old Miss Silverthorne, with a small serene smile, and a matter-of-fact quietness of narration, that made everyone draw nearer in confidence, "but nevertheless I had no power to move from the moment that *thing* entered the room, and afterwards I dared not go out of the room after it; hiding under the bedclothes seemed a protection.

"Indeed! what use was there in getting up? There was neither key nor bolt to the door.

"We had not long lain still, whispering and wondering in fright to each other, when for the second time the same soft-footed sounds entered, and seemed to pause beside our bed, as if doubtingly. We had both now hidden our heads under the bed-clothes, which we tightly held down. Again we felt the soft touches, not straying all over us as before, but this time like two quick pats, twice repeated on each of

the four sides. When these came near our throats it was with the utmost difficulty I could hold Patience quiet from hysterical struggles. Then all seemed silent again; and after a little time I ventured to steal out my head to reconnoitre in the darkness. 'It is gone—cheer up!' I whispered encouragingly, though I own I was trembling myself. But poor, dear Patience was trembling still more. 'It is coming back,' I hastily cried again, under my breath, to my sister. 'Lie still; be brave!' But she could bear no more, and, losing consciousness, remained very perfectly but alarmingly quiescent, while for the third time our dreadful nightmare came in pit-a-pat! This last time it crept softly all around us, but only gave one heavy pat to each of the four corners of our horribly haunted bed. . . . ! Once more it vanished, then all was quiet! And now, though I have always protested I did not faint, still"—the old lady hemmed—"still I own to sinking into what you might call a comatose state. And thus frightened and feeble—awake, but still under the nightmare influence—we lay till the housemaid's entrance, rattling open the shutters, roused us to a state of light and living companionship.

"And then she gave a start and a shriek, and we, slowly rising upright, stared upon the bed!—and what do you think we saw?"

Miss Silverthorne's voice had become very slow and distinct now; her intent gaze, as she looked round for guesses, showed that something very strange indeed had met her eyes.

"You saw bloody handmarks!" uttered Miss Goodchild, breathless with interest.

"No, no; it was a dog, depend upon it, and his paws were muddy," urged Colonel Dunn hotly, hoping for matter-of-factness, though Miss Silverthorne gently shook her head at him.

It was this—it was that—everyone suggested.

"You were covered with a funeral pall," hazarded one last adventurous spirit, taking a great flight of imagination.

The old lady softly smiled, and, in a small clear voice, said: "There was a cloth, and a breakfast service laid out on the top of us . . . !"

"A what? Oh, Miss Silverthorne, what an imposition!" cried Miss Goodchild, whilst Captain Luxton and Colonel Dunn, the infidels, exclaimed, "Grand! grand!" and chuckled in a manner quite disgusting to all persons of finer spiritual organisation.

The old lady now explained matters.

There had been a small page in buttons kept in the house of her former hosts. This page was in the habit of laying the table early in the breakfast-room when the family were alone; bewildered, perhaps, by the late and great festivities, and oppressed by a fear of omitting any of his duties, he had risen in his sleep and gone mechanically through his usual routine—not remarking in his dreaming state the substitution of a four-post bed for the table.

The rush of cold air was naturally caused by his waving the table-cloth to its full extent before smoothing it out; his second visit had been to lay the knives and forks; and lastly, the four gruesome pats, which had almost driven life to its innermost recesses in the persons of the trembling Misses Silverthorne, were simply and solely the plump disposition of the salt-cellars.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Our boat is asleep on Serchio's stream,
Its sails are folded like thoughts in a dream.

No one seemed inclined to tell another ghost story; so Jack Dimity went for the tea-kettle, and—amid a roar of masculine congratulation—some surreptitiously brewed rum-punch. These both made the audience stronger to bear the information gently broken to them as follows, by Captain Luxton:

"Here's a jolly go! Our old skipper says we shan't be back till four in the morning."

Four o'clock! and it was now scarcely midnight. Groans being useless, however, the male sex unanimously agreed that the ladies must be put under partial cover, at least, near the warmth of the boiler; whilst themselves should smoke and grumble aft to the partial satisfying of their souls.

But first arose a warm discussion as to who should house the distant members of the party on their final arrival in Marstown, since at four o'clock in the small hours no flys could be got near the landing-place.

Khyber Pass Road was the nearest place of refuge, and the Misses Silverthorne offered, with, no doubt, infinite puzzlings of mind, to take in all the "county people;" namely, two suave, pretty mothers, and three or four brusque-mannered, plainer damsels.

But this more than crowded every available inch of space

in their cosy nutshell of a home; and what was to be done with poor Una Goodchild? Mrs. Luxton, who was living in barracks, could be of no help, although the latter's chaperon.

At this—Mrs. Cox, discerning an excellent little opening for putting the thin edge of her wedge into "county society," hastily whispered to Daisy—then receiving a surprised assent, deftly squeezed herself up to Miss Goodchild's side, and with an excellent humility of hospitality offered the shelter of Magdala Villa for the remainder of the night; only regretting that the half of Miss Dimity's bed and apartment was all her spare accommodation. Taken by surprise, Una Goodchild, who was really bewildered what to do, and had a very frank nature, priding herself, too, on holding liberal if not democratic society opinions, said, "Yes—with many thanks," both to Daisy and Mrs. Cox.

"And, Mr. Dimity, it is so far to barracks! You shall have the drawing-room sofa for an hour or two, and then early breakfast—yes, you really must," pursued Mrs. Cox, so delighted with the fertility of her own invention she could not restrain her kindly tendencies.

Jack demurred naturally enough—said he thought getting back to his own room, however late, would be better for himself. But then Mrs. Cox gaily reminded him that he could not leave her and the young ladies to go up the Khyber Pass Road without an escort at such an early hour. It would be quite dangerous, she said (as if Afghans or hillmen were likely to be prowling thereabouts.)

"Oh yes—do come, Mr. Dimity; do let us all keep together, it will be so much more fun. I am sure your sister agrees with me," carelessly said Una, upon which Jack rather weakly gave way.

Back slipped Mrs. Cox, making elegant apologies, poor soul! as she stumbled in the dark over the toes of the county mammas.

"I've done it, my dears! I think I have quite fixed our future acquaintance with Miss Goodchild," she whispered with pardonable triumph, recounting her arrangements. "And then I have asked Mr. Dimity too—for evidently they get on so well together."

At this the unfortunate lady was overwhelmed with a torrent of reproaches, that had to be likewise murmured by both Pussy and Birdie; the latter of whom could not restrain her anger.

"Just like you—spoiling my prospects for the sake of your own selfishness, wanting to get in among the county set," muttered the passionate girl. "I hate the county girls! I hate Miss Goodchild! I shan't be civil to her! Hateful girl! did you not see the way in which she was running after him to-day? and just when I had got him so jealous, too, about the attentions Colonel Burke showed me." (This was not strictly true; it might be somewhat nearer veracity to say that Jack's complacency under the temporary loss of Miss Birdie's favour had opened the young lady's eyes unpleasantly.)

"It is Daisy, and not us, that Miss Goodchild cares for," softly grumbled Pussy. "And, for my part, I think we enjoy ourselves far more without knowing the county girls. They do us no good, so why should we do them any?"

"But they might—one should look ahead, dear, and not be selfish," the mother excusingly murmured, turning to Fuzzy for help.

But her eldest daughter, though usually some stay and support, only whistled under her breath, laconically observing: "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush!"

As all the ladies huddled together under partial cover, and tried to sleep, poor Mrs. Cox felt rather miserable. She seemed so nearly to have gained one of the pinnacles of her small social ambition; and lo! her own flesh and blood flouted her, and declared the prize worse than useless.

It was most disappointing, and she felt a vast inclination to weep a very little; perhaps a tear did steal down her faded, still handsome face. For she was verily more anxious for Birdie's welfare, as for that of all her girls, than even the latter themselves; and life seemed up-hill work; and she vaguely owned to herself they had not her own still elegant manners.

Then Daisy, being beside her, happened to draw a rug closer over the poor lady's knees, and whispered, tucking her in: "Dear Mrs. Cox, how kind of you to ask that charming girl! It was such a good idea; and she tells me she wants us all to go to a fancy fair to be held in her father's demesne next Wednesday."

There! as by magic Mrs. Cox's soul was comforted; so though the starlight grew colder, and the river-mist thicker, she soon slumbered comparatively happy.

As to Daisy, she was too utterly happy to sleep at all, or

do anything but dream wide-eyed, or doze—while yet fancying she could almost distinguish one voice among the murmurs that were wafted with cigar-scents faintly from forward.

And still she thought, and dreamed, of those stepping-stones; and then dreamed and thought again, till her brain was full of midsummer-night fantasy. But she did not wonder sagely, as she had for Jack: Would this be for her own *happiness*—being quite, quite sure about it!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

An open-hearted maiden, true and pure.

Almost everyone slept soundly in Magdala Villa next morning. Everyone but one foolish little damsel, whose foolish little heart and brain would not let her rest with their happy, delicious disquiet.

She tried to lie still as a daylight mouse; because Una Goodchild was sleeping beside her as soundly as if neither ghosts nor memories of yesterday any longer existed for Una. But after a time it would not do, for *he*—that is to say Captain Gascoigne—had said to her last night: "I shall drive past your house to my train at eight o'clock to-morrow morning; but you will not be up by then." Lying, listening in the darkened room, Daisy was sure, from faint noises in the kitchen regions, that it must be eight o'clock. She was afraid it was long past it; and felt quite bitter against herself for not having risen to look out—when, with an alarming "Too-hoo! too-hoo!" the cuckoo-clock struck six.

Again for long ages this most silly Daisy lay still, dozing, listening, remembering, imagining, all in a half dream, when a rumbling noise sounded in the distant street. At first, in her confused state, it seemed like thunder; but soon, with a start, she knew the sound to be that of wheels. Very few cabs or carriages passed Magdala Villa so early; it must be his! In a trice she had slipped noiselessly out of bed, and was behind the blind, peering through a most cautious little slit, as nearer and louder rolled—the milk-cart!

It was of no use going back to bed now. Daisy's blood was up against these practical jokes played upon her by the ironical gods; she felt obstinate determination that she would and should see Gascoigne that morning, and for a few moments her soft round face wore a perfectly grim expres-

sion. So she set about dressing, hoping not to waken Una Goodchild; but oh, the agonies of it!

How softly she crept about; but every chair she touched in the semi-darkness creaked as if it was an injured thing, or grated wickedly on the stained economy boards surrounding the small centre island of carpet. How the water she so cautiously poured into the basin seemed a little Niagara cataract, while her softest washings therein sounded like the splashings of the great sea-serpent.

At last, at last she had finished, and glided like a shadow out of the room; giving one thankful backward glance at the still undisturbed outline of the sleeper. After twice vainly trying to close the door noiselessly, which the lock refused to allow by teasingly shooting open again, Daisy finally gave it an indignant little slam. "Gracious!" She flew downstairs in precipitate dismay, for the noise seemed enough to wake old Rip van Winkle.

She wanted to look out on the street, so entered the drawing-room, where the lazy housemaid had not yet pulled up the Venetians—but then, poor soul! she had been sitting up awaiting the party till the small hours. Groping her way, Daisy suddenly tripped over the stumbling-block of a foot-stool, and, with a cry, fell forward upon the sofa, on a dark, long object she had not before perceived. With another cry the object rose, and she felt a sharp blow on her face.

"Oh, Jack—my nose!" she exclaimed, rubbing that hurt feature.

"Goodness gracious, Daisy, my nose! Is that you?" responded Jack with gruff bewilderment, also rubbing his tingling snubby one. Brother and sister had, in fact, adopted the Fijian form of embrace, and knocked their heads together.

"I quite forgot you were here," uttered poor Daisy with rueful regret, after making vague explanations as to her early rising.

"No matter. It's about time for me to jump up, anyway," said Jack, with a good-humoured, enormous yawn, as he pulled up the blinds with a vigorous clatter, and then surveyed his companion.

"What a little owl you do look, to be sure! Why, you can't have had a wink all night."

"No matter, dear, I can keep winking and blinking all day, you know. Don't you think it would be nice to open the window and have some fresh air?"

To this insinuating query Jack unsuspiciously agreed by throwing up the sash, and putting half his own body out, resting his hands on the window-sill.

"I say, here's old Gascoigne coming along in his trap," he loudly announced, after a few minutes, during which his sister had been trying to gaze round his back. Overcome by illogical shyness, Daisy instantly sprang into the innermost recesses of the room as the swift rattle of a fast-trotting mare and a dog-cart came up the Khyber Pass Road.

"Hallo! Good morning. How are you?" called out young Dimity in a sort of whispered shout, calculated not to wake the household, but to carry far, while he helped out these fraternal inquiries by friendly gesticulation—quite unwittingly thus acting Cupid's messenger.

"All right, thanks! How is everybody in there?" came back in passing accents, as the mare went rushing by. At that Daisy could keep back no longer, but darted again to the window; just in time to see a portion of Gascoigne's fast-receding back, with an excellent view of his impudent little groom, who sat facing her.

No matter, still she *had* seen him.

Daisy turned back again to the drawing-room with a light heart, humming a tune, as if that mere moiety of sight had acted like a dram of elation. And he had asked, "How is everybody?" plainly showing where his thoughts were; for without reasoning it out with herself little Miss Dimity had vaguely the opinion that such questions, in such cases, meant, "How is the one person who is everybody to me?" implying, as sang the great master in the knowledge of human hearts:

Thou art my all-the-world.

"O—w!" ejaculated Jack, with a sudden and enormous yawn. "How hungry I am!" At this moment, the door being open, an instance of the curious and frequent sympathy between minds was shown by Fuzzy's voice calling over the stairs: "I say, Mary—Susan—Mary! Is breakfast never coming? We are starving."

"We can't get it ready no quicker, miss, please," returned the injured voice of the cook, the kitchen being within easy reach of call at Magdala Villa. And in a still more injured and higher-pitched voice the tired-out maid added: "And, please, miss, however am I to carry up seven breakfastses to

bed single-handed, if even I had enough trays; but the two old tin ones and the little plated one——"

"Bother take the trays! Bring up everything to the stairs, then, and we can all slip out of bed and take what we want."

Fuzzy may have meant that the breakfast should be placed on a table at the stairs' foot; but whatever she meant her order was literally fulfilled.

Susan was soon heard sighing up the little back stair with the tea-service, whilst Mary came groaning after her with the fried eggs and bacon and toast.

Quoth Jack, grinding his teeth, with the longing to be using them:

"It's too much for me. By the powers above or below stairs, I must make a raid out there for food!"

"Oh, Jack—don't, Jack! I mean, Jack dear, let me go out first and get it for you."

"Wel—l! If you bring me what I want, you may," graciously grumbled Master Jack in permission, as his little sister tripped out deftly to serve him; then he surveyed her with one eye from behind the door.

"Take care, child. Is that brawn you are cutting so thick? Oh, murder, don't!" and, in agony, he rushed out to the rescue. Hardly had he helped himself, as he loved himself—and before the mustard was on his plate—when the slurring click-clack of bed-room slippers was heard overhead, and Daisy, craning her neck up the well-stairs, whispered:

"Rush, Jack! it's Pussy in her dressing-gown. Hide!"

"Oh, Jiminy!" wailed poor Jack, snatching one mouthful of his beloved brawn, and scuttling back to the recesses of the drawing-room with a highly virtuous air. Softly yawning, and grumbling, shivering a little sleepily, Pussy expressed rather uninterested surprise at the fact of Daisy's being actually dressed and ready to help her.

"I say, do pour me out some tea, dear; anything will do—just to let me get back to bed. Hi—ho! I think I can't get up to-day," and with more sighs and yawns and lackadaisical self-pities, Pussy slippered her slow progress aloft again, losing one of the said slippers occasionally.

"Thank Heaven she's gone; and I'm as hungry as a hunter," said Jack, in fervent congratulation, issuing again, and beginning to masticate *à belles dents*, as our neighbours say. "Aren't you hungry? I'm so hungry. Have some bread and butter and marmalade; I'm having some." But

even while his upraised knife was still hovering over the loaf, the starving wretch was deterred by the warning cry of "Fly, Jack!—Here is Birdie coming," and he precipitately fled from the approaching presence of this nymph. Birdie was now heard descending from the bed-room region in a hop-and-go-one fashion; scolding all the way in a sharp key against Pussy, who was no doubt comfortably snug once more.

"It is too unkind of you not to give me that tea. I'm sure you might know you are not half as tired as me," holding by the balusters with a simulation of bodily exhaustion that did not seem to extend to her mental faculties; then, with an angry wail, "it is so downright *selfish!*"

The silence from upstairs was of an aggravating nature, suggesting much placid enjoyment; upon which Birdie, appearing in a white garment and huge opera-cloak of her mother's slovenly wrapped around her, silver bangles still on her arms, and one of yesterday's earrings in her ear, rather snappishly exclaimed: "Goodness, Daisy, is that you?"

"Let me help you. I could not sleep, really, so I got up. Let me carry up your breakfast," gently urged Daisy, most anxious for sisterhood's sake to get Birdie and her bangles safely out of the way before her poor dear Jack should become utterly ravenous.

"You really are a good little creature," returned the young lady, with a mollified air; then, on still further second thoughts, remembering her own interest, "yes, really you are a darling! But wait, you are not giving me half enough jam. I like to eat it with a spoon at breakfast. And that bacon—you haven't given me the nicest bits; leave those thick ones for Fuzzy—she won't mind." Whereupon, after piling so many lumps of sugar into her tea that the apex of the pyramid was clearly seen above the liquid, though fast dissolving by the law of capillary attraction, Birdie Cox and her provisions were safely conveyed upstairs by the attendant Daisy, with as much pains as if the latter belonged to the commissariat department in this most military of garrison towns.

"What a mercy *she's* gone!" said Jack, in pious thanksgiving, sneaking back, and setting to work on his oft-deserted meal, perched uncomfortably on the umbrella-stand in the corner. "Keep a watch for the next one, like a good girl. This is what you might truly call 'cut and come again!'"

Daisy dutifully obeyed; but likewise began pouring out

her neglected boy's tea with most affectionate carefulness; so, as ill-luck would have it, both were so busy they neither spoke nor heard a sound but that of knife and fork, till there came a light, flying rush downstairs, and round the corner appeared Fuzzy, attired in a long Ulster coat, reaching to her toes, with her hair-fringe in curl-papers.

"Jerusalem!" uttered Jack. He was really so thunderstruck he could say no more. With a little cry Fuzzy sprang backwards, but immediately collapsed out of sight in an uncontrollable fit of laughter. "I'm so tremendously sorry," Jack apologised from below, in tones of mingled penitence and consolation; "but, after all, what does it matter? You surely need not mind with *only me*."

Young Dimity was of opinion, like many people, that one person may steal a horse whilst another may not look over the hedge; and that evidently he was the one man who might steal the horse. Fuzzy seemed rather to agree in his possession of peculiar privileges.

"Well, I'd rather it was you than almost anybody else," she brokenly ejaculated from the upper staircase, where she was, still half stifled under the influence of mortified mirth; her good-humour raising her to a much more exalted height than before in Jack's opinion. "Only, Daisy—do bring my breakfast up, like a dear."

So Daisy, in turn, waited upon her; and felt glad she had got up so early for two reasons, thus being called upon to make herself useful.

"They are a funny family! But one must take people as you find them, and, after all, they are some sort of cousins of ours, I believe," philosophically uttered Jack by-and-by, in confidence to his sister; as, having finished, he pushed his empty plate away among the other breakfast things, which was a trick Daisy secretly did wish he would give up.

"Our cousins, Jack—how can you say so?"

"I don't say so; they say so. I know nothing about it" (preparing to rush to barracks).

"It is only Mrs. Cox who is connected with our stepmother," corrected Daisy severely, for this was really a matter in which Jack's ignorance was to be reproved. "And they are only second cousins, once remov——"

"Good-bye," cried Jack, before she could explain the family ramifications to her own satisfaction, and was off.

Daisy then proceeded rather sleepily to collect some more breakfast for Una Goodchild; rightly judging the latter lady would not understand that she could find it on the stairs.

Mary, the weary maid, uplifted her voice in benediction at this unexpected help. "Lor' bless you, miss, the other young ladies never think of giving a hand's turn at anything, though missis herself often does. But she's awful bad with headache this morning, or she'd surely have seen to the strange young lady herself. Wait a minute, please; missis gave particular directions to take up the little plated tray to Miss Goodchild; and she unlocked me a napkin herself, and—oh! the good old cup and saucer as stands on the drawing-room cabinet."

Daisy, on receiving the latter, silently dusted them.

"How good you are!" cried Una, bouncing wide-awake, in her usual impulsive fashion, and the minute after looking at Daisy with dreamy eyes. "How could you awake so early? I never slept so soundly. And, dear me, what trouble I must be giving you all! How good it was of your cousins to take me in!"

Said Daisy, rather pedantically—for really this was a mistake that, though not serious, or what one would like to call compromising, still ought to be set to rights.

"I must tell you that the Coxes are not really my cousins. My stepmother and Mrs. Cox are only second cousins once re-*moved!*"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

I once was a bachelor, both early and young,
And I courted a fair maid, with a flattering tongue.
I courted her, I wooed her, I followed her then,
And I promised to marry her, but never told her when.

The gardens and part of the grounds of Fairlawns, Mr. Goodchild's home, had been thrown open for the purpose of holding a fancy fair therein.

Poor Mr. Goodchild! he hardly knew what it was all about; he was so used to being plagued in like manner by being asked to allow school-children, Odd Fellows, Marstown picnic roysterers, and Friendly Brothers, to hold their feasts in his demesne; and leave, in token of gratitude, fluttering newspaper scraps, broken bottles, and fragments of buns

and pie-crust, disfiguring the grass for days. He never liked to say no, being a weakly, good-natured philanthropist, and, the neighbours added, an oddity. Some of these even called him "that maniac, Goodchild." Their excellent reason for this latter term was that the Goodchilds had been Conservatives for centuries—till this one, inheriting the estate as a minor, had, on coming of age, declared himself Liberal.

Also he had queer whims, unlike those of his neighbours or forefathers, such as refusing to remain at college, or go into the army; preferring to muddle away his youth making bad oil sketches, beginning half a hundred collections of old pictures, older rusty armour, oldest coins, and himself only knew what else of old clothes, bones, and stones, of which he had defrauded the ragman, dust-heap, or museums, thought the neighbours. In all which collections he seldom got beyond the beginning. Then he spent much of his life abroad, "jabbering foreign languages, as if he liked them better than his own," as a neighbour squire again once reported. In fact, he was a man with a grain more originality than his fellows, which just led him astray; two grains more, and he might have been a man of mark.

He had crowned his progressing isolation among his fellows by his marriage. No one knew who his wife had been—could anything be more suspicious? Presently some more inquiring spirit discovered that no one could know who she was, because she did not know herself. She had been brought up in a convent in France, under the belief that her parents had died, having at least left her sufficient support. Her kind guardians there had been told no more. Mr. Goodchild, meeting her by chance, asked no more; never learned more. He was satisfied—but the neighbours, oh! of course they were not.

Poor Mrs. Goodchild might have held her rightful position, nevertheless, had she been a woman of spirit, or even of worldly tact. But she was mild, retiring, humble-minded; and wrapped up in her six tall sons.

The squire was wrapped up in his somewhat clever daughter; who had a decided mental resemblance to himself.

To this family group the Coxes, Jack Dimity, and his sister were introduced by Una when they arrived in the Fairlawns gardens on the day of the Fancy Fair.

The grounds, locally considered "among the sights to be seen" for their picturesqueness, were all alive with

crowds, who looked upon the fair as a glorious holiday; and, since it was held for a Marstown institute, had come out thence to patronise the Punch and Judy show the shooting gallery, Aunt Sally, and the refreshment tents, in particular. There were pretty stalls, draped with cool muslin, placed under the shade of the three patriarchal cedars that were the pride of Fairlawns. A row in a gaudy gondola could be had on a tiny pond, among the astonished mandarin ducks and an indignant Egyptian goose. Two bands were braying different valses at either end of the gardens; and in the evening there might be dancing on the grass in the trellised rose-plots. The roses were all full-blown in the height of their summer beauty; the walls were heavy with them; the greensward aflush with lower masses; and the day was one of the most gorgeous of a hot summer.

The Coxes were quite radiant; for, with much forethought, Una Goodchild, who had invited Daisy to help her in selling at Mrs. Goodchild's own stall, prevented all possible jealousy at this especial honour by imploring Fuzzy Cox to be a Pretty Skirmisher—and molest distant wary groups who would not come near danger. As war-ammunition against the enemy, she was provided with a trayful of the most unsaleable knitted pence-bags, baby socks, and similar small horrors. To please all, Una had actually beforehand asked the two youngest Misses Cox to personate rustic dairymaids, and milk an Alderney cow, to be garlanded, gilt-horned, and tethered amongst roses, and lilies, and daffydowndillies, by a streamlet's side.

"It was quite my own idea! Isn't it deliciously pastoral? And you two would just look the characters," she had earnestly said; so with flattered pride Pussy and Birdie accepted the task.

"We must dress *à la Watteau*," declared Birdie, and forthwith kilted up her muslin gown over a gay petticoat; and bought a new pair of cheap shoes with seven little buckles, and such high heels that she tottered.

Pussy slowly, with less originality, followed her example, adding a muslin hat, made so transparent that her head could be seen distinctly through it. The effect was funny; but Birdie, indignant at being outdone, forthwith not only hurriedly stitched herself another, but also supplanted her sister by the help of two very cheap white ostrich feathers.

Pussy silently put on a knot of ribbon and a rose.

And now they were all here: all eager for the fun.

"Only I should not advise you to begin milking now," said Una, who, with the cares of the day upon her shoulders, had collected her really good though often abstracted wits, and now made an excellent hostess. "Later on in the evening, when your gentlemen friends have come, you can persuade them to have syllabub, you know."

Of course! It seemed quite an easy thing beforehand to Pussy and Birdie to make the whole Marstown garrison drink syllabub; and they had gaily invited all their favourite officer-friends, and the Smeeth girls, and others, to come out to Fairlawns for the day, "For Miss Goodchild wants *us* to sell for her!"

Now they went off to seek out their town friends, saying, with a sprightly air of being quite at home in Fairlawns, "So you have come, dear.—Oh, *we* are selling for Miss Goodchild. She slept at our house the other night after a picnic we all had up the river; and then she asked us especially. Isn't she a charming girl?—so unaffected; such sweet manners!"

Mrs. Cox, with an ancient Indian shawl drawn gracefully round her really handsome figure, concealing the shining appearance of an aged black silk gown, was purely happy. She undulated amongst the groups, greeting her friends with even more elegance and warmth than usual, as if to show she was not proud; hinting at the fact of herself and girls being invited guests, and not come-by-chances, with almost a subdued air. Good soul! she feared it would seem in bad taste to appear exultant over her less fortunate friends, to the poorest of whom she was especially soft and conciliatory that day—only her eyes betraying her deliciousness of bliss.

Crowds now surrounded the Goodchilds' stall, all eager to patronise the wares of the young lady of Fairlawns. Too soon Una and Daisy were hot, busy, and wishing they had ten heads, that they might satisfy all the grasping old ladies who wanted to pay a compliment, but also have their money's worth—and all the delightful male beings who had "put so much money in their pocket, and did not care how it was spent."

"Oh, Mr. Dimity, I can't speak to you now," gasped Miss Goodchild, smiling and flushed, as Jack, who was always hanging about their stall, tried to draw her into conversation. "Would you mind raffling this frightful green cushion for me,

as no one will buy it. Don't you know how? Oh, one of the Misses Cox will help you."

Off went Jack rather disgusted, whilst Birdie, who had been uselessly trying to attract his attentions hitherto, offered her services with glee.

As to Fuzzy—she was like an erratic rocket, rushing hither and thither through groups which scattered with dismay at sight of her tray, which was constantly emptied and as steadily replenished.

When her Marstown acquaintances, seeing her in the distance, would dive behind shrubbery clumps, or flee through vistas of greenhouses, lo and behold! it was of no use; for when they emerged, hot and sneaking, Fuzzy was sure to be at the other side, meeting them in the face with her gay war-cry of, "I've caught you now! What will you buy?" When poor Colonel Dunn at last fairly took to his heels, everyone turned to watch the chase, with base enjoyment; till at last the hero of a hundred fights was actually run to earth among the pea-blossoms, where he was hiding in vain. Then out rang the fair pursuant's voice of victory again: "I've caught you; now what will you buy?—What, no money left! Come, then, though I'm as poor as a church-mouse myself, I don't mind lending you five shillings."

Returning from this successful raid, Miss Cox saw Daisy speaking across her counter—with an air of greater familiarity than was usual in that modest maiden towards her Marstown new acquaintances—to a clergyman dressed in the height of the High Church fashion, which seemed to the irreverent Fuzzy a black dressing-gown, roped and tasselled.

"Who is your friend, the parson in petticoats?" she carelessly whispered, flinging herself down on a seat, and panting. "I've been trying to make him buy a flower for his button-hole for ever so long, and nothing would induce him; but he wanted a housewife, he said, which I hadn't got, so I very nearly offered him myself."

"Oh, Fuzzy!" exclaimed Daisy, scandalised. "Why, that is our clergyman at home, at Elm Hall. He is down near here on a visit. I told you he was supposed to be vowed to celibacy, didn't I? And to offer him a flower!"

"Well, now that I look again, he has no button-hole. But it is rather a pity he means to be an old bachelor—not that I ever cared for curates. But he is very handsome. . . . Why don't you introduce him to me?"

Fuzzy turned her head as she spoke. Good gracious! —the clerical object of her remarks had come up close behind them. Both girls blushed, and were inclined to laugh in confusion, but Daisy mischievously introduced the Reverend Adolphus Younghusband, who blushed likewise all over his fair face, up to the fair little lovelocks on his forehead. The irrepressible Fuzzy, whose spirits seemed at fever-height this day, gave him an arch glance (and really she looked very pretty, fanning herself under the cedar-tree).

"You were very hard-hearted, you only bought three dolls and a knitted nightcap from me."

The young Adolphus deepened his delicate complexion again under her glance, to Daisy's surprise.

"Indeed, if it had not been for your persuasions! . . . The dolls are in my pocket now, and I am afraid of sitting on them! I intend them for the poor children of my parish; and I have already once disgraced myself by pulling out the nightcap instead of my handkerchief." Then he added, recovering his self-possession, "I must confess I won a hideous green cushion besides in a raffle, and its possession made me so unhappy, I hid it under a tree for whoever may chance to find it."

"Nonsense!" cried Fuzzy, springing up with refreshed energies. "Where? Let us raffle it again! . . . You might help me to sell, if you won't buy any more—will you?" and she gave him a second glance prompted by pure malice, because of his supposed leanings towards celibacy.

"I—I shall be very happy—in such a good cause as—as that of this Fair," stammered the young man, with a deprecating look towards Daisy and her brother Jack, who were enjoying his evident confusion. He added to Fuzzy, as they moved off, "I have been admiring all day the diligence and energy with which you have been selling, Miss Cox. May I carry your tray?—is it not too heavy for you? It is so good of you to let me help you, for I feel quite a stranger in the land here. I know none of the ladies excepting Miss Dimity, who so kindly introduced me to you; and that is such a novel sensation."

Fuzzy, flushed with success, and intoxicated with the ardour of her own exertions, made the most of her capture; thinking, with her spirits at fever-height, what a joke she would have with Major Hodge and the Marstown girls over her amazing flirtation. Meanwhile the hot afternoon wore

on; the constant popping reports from the shooting-gallery echoed; Punch and Judy squeaked; the crowds still came and bought, and went with increasing mirth and noise, as the prices of admission grew lower—but the spirits of the Fairlawns saleswomen began to droop—no wonder!—under the prolonged patronage of the mixed multitude. Daisy all this while had been working on with noiseless steadiness; always at Una's elbow whenever the latter turned, hot and flurried, for help; always ready with twine or scissors, produced from the pockets of a pretty apron, whilst Una was tossing about everything wildly, or grovelling amongst background litter in search of a knife never found. And when the absent-minded girl, in her eager enthusiasm, would pour a perfect Pactolus of sovereigns into the shilling box—and streams of silver amongst the gold—it was Daisy again who always set all to rights.

"You are the dearest creature in the wide world," cried Una, thanking her rapturously again and again. "What should I have done without you—yes, and your brother, too!—now that Miss Cox has deserted us just when our work was at its very height?"

For a little while ago the burly form of Major Hodge, with his attendant satellite Mr. Jones, had been seen arriving; and Fuzzy thereat thrust her tray into the hands of the Reverend Adolphus Younghusband, basely bidding him "just make the best bargains he could." Infant hoods then went indeed at a dead loss; babies' socks might almost be had for the asking; as the shame-faced curate only sought to disperse these wares as rapidly as possible. He felt quite deserted, too, among strangers, like the forlorn Strephon lamenting—

> Ye poor little sheep, ah! well may ye stray,
> While sad is your shepherd and Clio away.

Then it was that Jack Dimity, seeing his chance, offered his help at the stalls, and managed to make very fair progress in Miss Goodchild's friendship; that between her and his sister being fast cemented. Daisy had seen Major Hodge before Fuzzy, however. He had come straight to her stall, and, leaning his elbows thereon, with a friendly grin, said:

"What do you think? We have got our orders; I for one must leave Marstown the day after to-morrow."

"Oh! are you not sorry?" Daisy exclaimed, with a world of commiseration in her voice (but it was not for him).

"Well, haw—haw, I don't know. This place has grown very hot, you see," with a meaning twinkle in his blue, deceitful, somewhat "swivel eye." "And then we are going to Jersey; cool sea-breezes there, and lots of pretty girls."

"How tired you young ladies look! Hot work—thirsty, eh?" cried Colonel Dunn, just then coming up with a cheery smile and kindly bustle. "'Pon my word, you should all come and have some tea. I assure you I've already carried twenty-three unsteady cups of tea, in sloppy saucers, from that tent, and here I'm at it again—still coming and going, like Mulligan's blanket, eh, Miss Goodchild? What! you don't understand the proverb? Why—the blanket was always on the move between home and the pawnshop."

"Would it not be a good time now for syllabub," asked Una Goodchild, with true bazaar eagerness resolved to turn even their own thirst into twopence each.

The signal passed around, and soon all the world was moving like a parched army towards the single grazing Alderney with its pretty ribbons, whilst there was a general cry of "Where are they going to, our pretty dairymaids?"

Poor Mrs. Cox, in feverish anxiety lest her dear girls should miss their chance of being distinguished, fluttered up and down the gravel walks—where they obviously were not—giving little chirping, agitated calls.

"I'll engage I'll find them out," at last valiantly declared Jack Dimity; so, followed by a more timid search party, consisting of Daisy, Una, Lee, and Colonel Dunn, he dived, without hesitation, amongst the shrubberies. A petticoat's flutter and a little giggle revealed Birdie hiding close by among the laurels, within hearing of all the calls, and in the company of Captain O'Donoghue.

"I thought, as you didn't seem very anxious for my company just now, that you should not have it again just so soon as you wished," she pertly remarked to Jack, tossing her head; although evidently she was reconciled to his defection by the delight of having drawn to her side difficult O'Donoghue, who had hitherto patronised Pussy. Miss Pussy herself was still to be sought; when, oh, horror! adown a lone alley, Daisy, Colonel Dunn, and Smiler Lee, who were ahead, espied Fuzzy and Major Hodge, only partially veiled by the foliage of a weeping willow, under which they were appropriately sitting. Quite desperate as to the chance of passers-by, Fuzzy was reposing with her head on

her companion's shoulder, and his arm round her waist, loudly dissolving in tears which her swain seemed trying to staunch by a generous application of his own red silk handkerchief. Daisy sprang back, and, with a presence of mind perfectly extraordinary to herself, cried to the others: "Oh, this way is so damp, and leads to nothing, I am sure! Let us go back."

"Very damp," echoed the Smiler, suppressing a convulsion of chuckles, and adding, aside: "Oh, you are irresistible! —what a good-natured girl you are!" Then in another aside and a fresh ecstasy of internal mirth: "And this sort of way leads to nothing, does it, Colonel?"

Good-natured Colonel Dunn shook his head rather pityingly, and muttered in answer:

"Well—well; I'am afraid not. It's a great pity, a great pity. But he's not well off, is he? And the poor girl has nothing, has she? Dear, dear; I'm afraid it will only be the old story: 'A tocherless dame sits lang at hame.'"

Daisy quite loved Colonel Dunn for the kindly regret of that speech, which she accidentally overheard.

But now the gentle, blushing Pussy had been likewise discovered somewhere, and somehow in company with Mr. Jones; so nothing more seemed to hinder the brewing of syllabub.

The Watteau dairymaids (shade of Watteau, how very British they look!) gaily acknowledged they had never tried milking before, but "Of course it was quite easy!" Down sat Pussy first amidst an admiring crowd, on a charming little wicker chair. The Alderney turned on this unusual milking-stool a suspicious eye—then swish went her tail full across Pussy's face, with a most aggrieved blow.

"Nasty brute!" cried Pussy, springing up, with her feelings much injured and cheeks insulted, as an irrepressible laugh broke from the gaping crowd.

"Let me try," cried Birdie, with undaunted self-conceit.

Worse and worse! The poor cow, growing frightened, made a few uneasy plunges, then with a sound kick upset the milking-stool, empty milk-pail, and all! whilst the milkmaid, frightened but unhurt, half flew, half fell into a dozen arms, and was rescued by a dozen heroic hands almost in hysterics.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"I have sold all my trumpery; not a counterfeit stone, not a riband, glass, pomander, brooch, table-book, ballad, knife, tape, glove, shoe-tye, bracelet, horn-ring . . . . they throng who should buy first; as if my trinkets had been hallowed, and brought a benediction to the buyer!"

The little cow was led off, gaily whisking her tail in victorious disgrace. Miss Goodchild, immediately scanning her bazaar populace with the eye of a leader, and anxious to hide the chagrin of the milkmaidens

All forlorn,
Who milked the cow with the crumpled horn,

laughingly drove all her friends to the tea-tent. Here they all sat on wobbling wooden forms placed on the uneven grass; and made very merry over stale pastry round the festive board, which was indeed the right word in the right place, being, like our ancestors' tables, simply boards on trestles. Every Jill now seemed to have her Jack; every dame a cavalier to bring her tea—excepting one. Daisy had no *cavalier servente*, which quite distressed her friend Una.

"This is not like our picnic-party, is it, dear? I am so sorry you have got no one to bring your tea."

"Don't be sorry," laughed Daisy, brightening up from her staid mood of the day, adding, "for though I've got no one, as you say, to look after me, I want no one."

"Don't say that—for you've got *me!*" cried the gay voice of the Smiler at her elbow. Quicksilver flirt that he was, smiling like the sun in royal impartiality on all, he had not been at all devoted to her hitherto that day. At the same moment old Dr. Cox, who had lately arrived—intercepting deftly the Smiler's advance—trotted up to Daisy, whom he also had hitherto disregarded, exclaiming: "Ah! fair charmer, do I hear you say you want someone to attend upon your wants? Now don't mind that young man; he's an artful deceiver, I assure you." So saying, he inserted his own corpulent person comfortably into the chair Lee had just been about to take, adding, "Come! instead of thinking only of these young beaux, give an old man the pleasure of admiring you, like the sensible, nice girl you are. Eh, Miss Goodchild, is not our dear young friend a sweet girl?" And he beamed from ear to ear upon Una, who, as usual that day, sat close on Daisy's other side, having conceived an exceeding affection for her. (At that moment Daisy felt as if the

old doctor was a humbug, seeing the only other empty place was beside his own daughter Birdie; but how *she* would have privately scolded the doctor for going there when Lee might have had it.) Una answered with coldness, springing brusquely out of her seat, "My mother wishes particularly to make your acquaintance, Dr. Cox. Will you come and be introduced to her?"

The little doctor stared. At that moment Mrs. Goodchild was seated amongst some of the county magnates, who were, as they called it amongst themselves, "doing the civil" to the quiet mistress of the place, who cared so little for them. But before he could fairly grasp the honour, in his excessive delight, impetuous Una carried him off like a whirlwind, and returning whispered:

"There! isn't that a deliverance? People think me so very absent-minded and unobserving, I know; but for all that, when I wake up sometimes, I can see what is real or sham as well as anyone. I rather liked, too, interrupting those old dowagers who are cackling round poor mamma. Lady de Hautenbas looked so huffed at my pushing Dr. Cox amongst them all, as if he were as good as themselves. They think me so unconventional, which is just what I wish."

"Grand girl!" whispered the Smiler, resuming his place beside Daisy, with a confidential air. "It was so good of her, for I was just wanting to have a private talk with you. You always do me so much good; you cheer me up."

Never before having seen Smiler Lee in want of cheering up, Daisy perceived, with some surprise, that his little godship's visage seemed veiled by a slight fog.

"What were you doing all afternoon—who were you with?" she asked. She had hit the mark.

"Well—well, I wanted to be with Miss Le Hunt. You know how I admired her the other day—you were such a good, sensible girl, and not a bit jealous," began poor Lee, fairly longing to bubble over with his disgust. "And she told me, too, she hoped to meet me here, you know; and all that sort of thing, don't you know; but ever since I came she has been so taken up with that man over there with her now, that she won't even look at me."

"What—that ugly man?" as Daisy saw one with a large nose and a large eyeglass, and the general facile outline of an elephant with a white moustache.

"Looks a great haw-haw fellow, doesn't he? Yes, I

knew you'd say that, like a sensible girl as you are," eagerly assented the Smiler; and, recovering himself, he flung five smiles on her in succession, and twisted up one moustache-tip that had grown limp over his unkind, lost love. "*He's* in the —th Lancers, that's what it is; so, of course, a poor, ordinary soldier like me has no chance against a dashing cavalry officer, that is to say, in most young ladies' opinions!" (with exceeding bitterness). "That is what riles me so in Miss Le Hunt throwing me over for him, for I had *such* a high opinion of that girl before! The fact is, you meet with a great deal of ingratitude and bad feeling in this world, and I have a very great mind to throw up society altogether," with an enormous sigh, which surely should have been enough to utterly melt society's heart. Daisy, with sympathetic scornfulness, suggested, "Perhaps he has some attraction for Miss Le Hunt, that you and I are too dull to discover."

"Do you think the shape of his collars is better than mine?" anxiously inquired Lee—his proof of confidence in a girl was asking her opinion concerning the cut of his clothes, for he and his friend O'Donoghue made dress a matter of competitive examination and their collars of monthly meditation. Major Hodge and Fuzzy had now come into the tea-tent with a rather slinking air. But soon the gay Freebooter's usual habits of mind re-asserted themselves, and slyly at first—then, more boisterously—be began to poke jokes at his friends. *His* heart, he wished humorously to demonstrate, would, at any rate, not be broken to-morrow by the "girl he left behind him." Poor Fuzzy sat near. But she was not so ready in her mirth somehow as the facile major, though far more at pains to conceal her melancholy. So she took refuge in aggressiveness; and with the tip of her little nose as red as the edges of her eyelids, while her speech was very acid, she made herself as unlike her better self as could be. The bold Freebooter's wordy raids were principally into the boglands of his young follower Jones's understanding. For this youth, being less thoroughly used to leave-takings, looked rather troubled in his heavy mind; and occasionally glanced at Pussy with a sheepish air, as, sitting very close to him, she frequently sighed or whispered in his ear.

"Cod-fish, you brute! What a brute you are, Cod-fish!" said Major Hodge, addressing his friend Jones by his nickname, evidently with a view to cheer him. The Cod-fish

grinned; and, having no such fire of light raillery and sparkling wit as his superior, contented himself with gazing round at the company for approbation, and stuffing an enormous piece of bread, piled mountains high with jam, into his mouth.

"How ill you will be to-night, Mr. Jones," pursued his friend. "Won't Mr. Jones be ill to-night?" he asked of everyone. The peculiar flavour of this joke now lay in so politely calling the Cod-fish *Mr.* Jones. Leaving the others to the continued enjoyment of this funny conversation, Una and Daisy rose with a business-like air to resume their labours, closely followed by Jack and Smiler Lee. Just outside the tent, they thus became witnesses of a rather noteworthy incident.

Poor Mrs. Cox had hitherto, on various airy pretexts, refused all invitations to come and have tea. The truth was that tea cost a shilling a-piece; and though she had cheerfully urged her daughters to go, being anxious they should "do everything like the rest of the world," she was always ready to pinch herself for economy. So, being very hungry, the good lady had now stolen up when the rest were gone, and surreptitiously bought herself a vulgar bun. She had hardly begun to eat it, however, when Mrs. Goodchild wandered by, and, with languid abstracted kindliness, stopped to have a little conversation. To be caught eating a penny bun by the lady of Fairlawns herself, who had invited the Coxes, patronised them, so to say, through her daughter; and who doubtless expected everyone to support the bazaar to the uttermost end of their purses! Mrs. Cox was utterly confounded—humiliated; so popping the wretched bun behind her back in abasement of spirit, she gave a pale, abashed smile to her hostess, while trying to look perfectly composed.

"Hallo! Look! I say, do you see behind there? Won't there be fun?" murmured the Smiler and Jack at this moment, in huge delight. For up behind Mrs. Cox—all unconscious—they now saw a naughty urchin creeping. A "little vulgar boy," who had evidently fixed the twinkle in the corner of his eye on the bun that ill-fated lady held behind her back.

"Tea, do you say? Oh! no more, thank you, dear Mrs. Goodchild. So good, so kind of you to think of asking me," said Mrs. Cox meekly. "But I am not at all hungry now."

Hey, presto! The bun was whipped smartly out of her hand at the words, and off made the young robber with his prize. Mrs. Cox did give a slight start—they saw her—but, with wonderful composure, she scarcely, *scarcely* looked round.

Only just enough to see it was no dear friend who had played her such a practical joke; then anxiously scanned Mrs. Goodchild's face, to see had she seen. Thank goodness, no! The greater lady's countenance was still an amiable blank.

"Oh! Jack, I know for certain she has had nothing to eat all this day," pityingly uttered Daisy, whilst her brother and Lee were sinfully overcome with suppressed appreciation of the situation. Mrs. Goodchild, satisfied, had gently strayed away.

"Well, she shall have something, then," exclaimed Jack, recovering himself. "She's a good woman, I declare; and I'll treat her to a dozen cups of tea and to all the buns left in the tent if she likes." So away he went, and in the wooing tones of a hearty young British lion insisted, in spite of Mrs. Cox's half-hearted remonstrances, in tucking her arm under his, and carrying her off to be royally fed. The evening came on; the stalls were emptied, save for some veriest refuse of knitted trash; the Marstown crowds were slowly going homewards, cracking jokes and nuts; and but few people were left in the Fairlawns gardens, where the dusk was falling and a nightingale beginning to sing.

"Ah, how glad I am they are all gone!" cried Una Goodchild, brusquely, pulling off her hat to cool her aching temples as she and Daisy stood under one of the grand old cedars. "They have taken away the flavour of oranges and ginger-beer that offended my nostrils all day. Now one can breathe freely again. Do you ever ask yourself at night, dear: What has the day brought forth? I wonder what this day has brought forth in especial to any of the people here."

"Not much to me," said Daisy staidly. She was thinking to herself, however, that it had brought the end of a foolish dream to poor Fuzzy; that it had brought disappointment and anger to Birdie; that it had apparently laid the foundations of a mutual liking between Jack and Una herself.

"The day has not brought much to you, you say," echoed Una; suddenly waking out of a state of dream into which she used often to fall by fits, though again rousing by starts a few moments after. "No, don't say that, for it has brought us better acquaintance, dear. I never had a girl friend before —I never cared to have one—but, if you don't think me too hasty in saying so, I feel as if we were friends after to-day. Dear me! it is such a curious sensation. I feel quite rich."

On which she impulsively pressed Daisy's arm fondly;

feeling, who can say?—and all the stings that the uttered or imagined sneers of other girls would inflict.

Rattle—rattle! in the next room was now heard; Birdie's voice jangling in sharp, shrewish tones with Pussy's softer, more guttural remonstrances. Then came a thumping, and dragging of furniture, as it seemed.

"What is she doing now?" murmured poor Fuzzy, with an aching head. Daisy then heard her own name called, and went out to see. Birdie, with a colour much heightened above even her natural strawberries-and-cream complexion, was pushing and pulling along the famous dummy.

"There! I am bringing this thing to your room; for I'm *not* going to be plagued with it any more. Your brother made it, so you may keep it; or else give it to Miss Goodchild, since he is so fond of her," she snapped out, giving the lay figure a vicious shake and shove, with a look as if she would rather have liked doing the same by Daisy, Jack, and Una Goodchild, all three. Daisy rather felt what maid-servants call "a turn," but meekly said:

"Let me help you;" and, despite Birdie's biting retorts that she wanted no help, and only requested leave not to trouble her, Daisy caught up the offending object in her own plump arms, and being, though small, as strong as a Shetland pony, easily put it in her own room. Birdie was now of a raspberry hue all over her face, but the intense surprised [illegible]tness of this "stranger lass" whom she had just tried to [illegible] prevented any further outburst. Daisy's plump dignity [illegible] its own way something so solid, though her face was [illegible] as a baby saint's, that it made itself respected. This [illegible] over, little Miss Dimity returned to look after poor [illegible]'s headache. She drew down her blinds; shook up [illegible]illows; bathed her forehead; and finally left her re[illegible]ed and quieted to sleep awhile—with the prospect of [illegible]g out together later for a quiet walk far from the Mall, [illegible] streets, shops, and all their attractions, which generally [illegible]e so engrossing to the Cox minds. But as Daisy leisurely [illegible]nt downstairs with her quiet step—wondering how she [illegible]uld best this day succeed in mutely sympathising with [illegible]x's silently distressed face, propitiating Birdie's ill[illegible]bearing with Pussy's mock grief, and comforting [illegible] for whom she had most genuine pity and liking—her [illegible]ame, uttered in a loud and angry, gibing tone through [illegible]pen drawing-room door, made her pause a moment.

"Who is that? Go away, do, and leave me in peace," was called out harshly from within. "Oh! it's you, is it?" followed in somewhat milder, muffled tones, and there was the sharp click of a bolt being withdrawn by means of a long cord, the end of which Fuzzy kept beside her bed. Daisy, entering, stumbled on a breakfast-tray, that had plainly been only taken inside the room in compliance with motherly entreaties; but had, then, just been set down untasted. Here the blinds were drawn up, and the light fell garishly on a hot, flushed face, and eyes sore with crying, that stared almost repellently at the light and at Daisy. "Bolt the door again, do. I can't bear any of those others," she sharply said; then, as Daisy softly came beside her, and hesitatingly asked, 'What is the matter?" the girl buried her head on her guest's shoulder.

"What is the matter?—only that I am a fool, dear!" Fuzzy answered with agitated self-contempt under her breath. "All women are fools, I begin to believe; and I am a worse one than most, to torment myself so about a man who never cared—— At least, no, I do believe he did care; in his own way, you know. Don't abuse him to me, dear, just yet; my sisters tell me he was a great, old, fat flirt. They want to make me think less of him—and by-and-by maybe I shall agree with them; but just yet I'd rather not . ." Then after a little while she went on, more passionately: "Oh, dear! I am sick of my life here. I wish I could live in the depths of the country like you, and not have to 'keep up appearances' before people. It must be all peaceful and innocent there; with no love-affairs for men to laugh about and for women to cry over."

"Come back with me to my home, dear Fuzzy," urged Daisy, in a most pitying and comforting tone. "Come back with me to Elm Hall; they will all be so glad to see you. My father seemed quite distressed in his letter that I should be enjoying your hospitality, and yet that none of you have made a promise to visit us. And Polly will be delighted."

So Fuzzy promised; with the feeling that any change would be blessed. Green fields and still woods and waters would rest her aching eyes, that now wearied of Marstown chimneys, and the future sight of fresh red-coats; the uneventful Arcadian life of a comfortable country house in summer-time, in the depths of a sleepy county, would dull the smarts of wounded vanity and fancy—whether it was really a stronger

feeling, who can say?—and all the stings that the uttered or imagined sneers of other girls would inflict.

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"Daisy Dimity, indeed! now don't praise her up any more to me, mamma; for I am just sick of her," uttered Birdie. "You thought yourself so very clever in asking her here; you were sure it was the very best way to catch her brother."

"Birdie, hush. For shame! I will not allow this; it is most disrespectful."

"Fiddlesticks, mamma! It is the downright plain truth; and you may just as well call a spade a spade, instead of pretending to talk of your dear cousin, Mrs. Dimity, that you never even saw or cared to see," burst out the infuriated girl again, who was plainly neither to "hand nor to bind" in her present excitement. Daisy had turned at the very first, but as she had all the stairs to re-ascend softly, and that Birdie talked very fast and loud, she could not help overhearing so far—and this much more at the last:

"And now he has deserted me for that horrid Miss Goodchild that you brought here—another of your clever ideas! And Miss Dimity has just been working heaven and earth to take away Smiler Lee from us; and even trying for Captain Gascoigne so hard that he has run away to be rid of her."

The door of Daisy's room upstairs closed with a click, and a very dismayed little girl stood in the middle of the floor. If Birdie had only given her "rather a turn" before, she had given her a most decided one now. This was dreadful!—to be living on the Coxes' hospitality while their daughter could say such unkind, false words of the guest; to be obliged by politeness to talk to her as if nothing had happened, perhaps to smile—worst of all, to receive her kisses! For that very morning Birdie had given her sweet Daisy ever so many caresses on either cheek before breakfast, by way of an appetising exercise, it seemed; and had smiled on her most brilliantly. It was all too horrible.

Daisy felt as if she must leave the house that minute. Her gorge rose at the idea of eating the bread of people who all the time plainly wished her gone—grudged her the liking of any one of her brother's friends, and put such coarse interpretation on her innocent pleasure in their society. It was a house of tears truly at that moment, for downstairs Birdie had ended by forcing herself into hysterics; and the mother's eyes had had tears not far from them all morning.

Daisy began to cry "a wee." What she complained of

was that she felt so *hurt;* having truly tried to like all these people, even Birdie, and to think well of them, and not let Jack or Mr. Lee laugh at them. And then—then, too, she had so longed to wait for the great ball—and till Captain Gascoigne should come back. But soon Daisy's tears, being very soft, melted the feelings of first anger out of her. Second thoughts came; and she remembered that Mrs. Cox had evidently praised her; that Fuzzy was undoubtedly fond of her—while Pussy's feelings, if indifferent, were not altogether unfriendly, for she had graciously intimated that she wished her future visit to Elm Hall to be considered as fixed for the hunt ball—the one great ball of the year, to which Daisy and Polly had been taught to look forward, from the days of their short frocks, as shedding mild rapture upon all the remaining three hundred and sixty-five days of the year in that privileged region.

No!—for their feelings' sake it would be ill-tempered, perhaps underbred, to pack her box now, and be off in a huff. But there were yet two days before the ball; two long, dreary days to be existed through without seeing (Gerald) Gascoigne. If it had not been for the hope of hearing her beloved Jack's cheery accents on one day at least—on the other, duty, that odious word in the military meaning, would detain him—Daisy felt so heart-sick with the annoyance of Birdie's revelation, and all the previous minor vexations she had undergone from jealousy and gossip in this new society, that she would have almost been glad to flee to dear Elm Hall that very day, and hear the squire's loud, glad greeting, and take refuge in Polly's young but sheltering arms. She was aware, too, of secret fears she dared not face that Fuzzy's fate might, alas! be only a foreshadowing of her own. Anyhow, Daisy rose up determined that she would gently hint that her visit had been unduly prolonged by waiting for Jack's regiment's ball. If this was negatived, and she was begged by the most of the family to wait for it—as proved to be the case that evening—then she was nevertheless determined that the very next morning she must say good-bye.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Neobùle, wing'd Love has flown off with thy spindles and basket of wools !
And thy studious delight in the toils of Minerva is chased from thy heart
By young Hebrus, the bright Liparean.

Daisy felt calmer, and slipped out to pay the Misses Silverthorne a visit.

How peaceful and happy the very cat looked, lazily sauntering among its preserves of a yard of privet hedge and three well-clipped bushes approaching the entrance of Lilac Lodge. It was only one pebble's throw distant from that of Magdala Villa.

How Fido, snow-white and cross from his bath, yet deigned to rub himself dryer a moment against his late preserver in the tiny hall.

And in the drawing-room what a glad twitter broke from the little old ladies as their visitor came in; and this day, instead of lavender, a scent of dried rose-leaves seemed hovering round the old-fashioned furniture and embroidery, the Corydons and Phyllises on screens and cushions, or of Chelsea china; all that suggested having been lived with and loved by refined gentlewomen. It was all so home-like, dainty, and fragrant, after the painful newness of the Magdala furniture—with its tables bare of books, magazines, work-boxes, or any of that pleasant, useful litter which proves that the inmates of a reception-room use their brains as well as their fingers, and do not think of passing most of their time and of hiding their work in an untidy den. After some friendly opening chat, Daisy, with blushing face, lightly let fall how short her probable stay in Marstown must be.

"I might even go before *the ball*," she ended, in a small, quiet voice.

"Go before the ball!" The spinsters raised their hands and eyes. Then Miss Prudence briskly said: "Child, what is the matter? Are the other girls in there grown jealous of you?"

"It does not do to outstay one's welcome, you know," quoth poor Daisy evasively.

"True," murmured Miss Patience, "as King Solomon says in his proverb, 'Withdraw thy foot from thy neighbour's house; lest he be weary of thee, and so hate thee.'"

The elder Miss Silverthorne had begun knitting briskly

at a white silk garter, and asked, with an air of rather suspicious indifference, "By-the-way, Gerald Gascoigne is away still. When does he come back, I wonder?"

"He told me he hoped to come back the night of their ball—if possible; but he had been asked to do some business for other people, so he would not like to hurry over it," answered Daisy, falling into the innocent trap.

"Ah!—oh!—yes; just like dear Gerald—Gerald Gascoigne. So very probably he won't be back for it," observed Miss Patience, with an air of equally suspicious indifference to that displayed by her sister; and she began beading a red silk purse, such as our great-grandmammas used, in a pattern of pink strawberries.

Somehow Daisy had expected, in an undefined way, more sympathy here. She kept back with pains a bitterness of gall from rising in her heart, but felt alone in a strange land. After all their kindness of speech before, after their liking Captain Gascoigne so much, as they said—surely they might mutely understand how hard it seemed to go away, and lose the last chance of seeing him once more! She tried to force a little chatter, though her heart was thus heavy laden.

"Yesterday *you* were knitting the silk garter, and Miss Silverthorne was beading the purse—why have you changed your work?"

"We always exchange our work each day, my dear; it makes us feel more united. Neither of us likes to do anything in which the other has not an equal share. I shall knit again to-morrow," blandly replied Miss Patience, but with an abstracted air, as if she were not thinking much of her little guest at all.

Daisy, still more crestfallen, turned to Miss Prudence.

"Do you know, at first I was quite puzzled to know the difference between you, you are both so very much alike," she said, with some feeble guile; for the old ladies were very proud if anyone was misled by their great similarity, which they also tried to keep up in dress and various other little ways. "One day," went on Daisy, "I remarked that your mittens had black bars at the back, but Miss Prudence's had feather-stitch, so I thought that would help me—only next time I was terribly puzzled, for it seemed to me that——"

"That we had changed our mittens; exactly! and so we had," blandly replied Miss Prudence, with a tone of equal want of interest in the subject to that lately shown by her

sister. "In a few such articles of dress, my dear, when we cannot get them exactly alike, we make it a point always to wear them turn-about. It makes us seem more united in such little outward matters, as we are, I hope, in mind and affection. So one day you may see me wearing our black Brussels veil with the rose-pattern, and the next day I shall wear the one with the sprig while Patience puts on the rose-pattern. It is the handsomest."

Her voice died off in an abstracted manner. Daisy's conversation was utterly flagging. She gazed out of the window, feeling very sore at heart, and tried to say blithely, in a small voice: "I am afraid I must say good-bye. It will be a good-bye for a long time, too, won't it? for nothing is likely ever to bring me back to Marstown when Jack's regiment goes soon. And you are hardly more likely to come near Elm Hall, are you? although I do wish you would. And many, many thanks now for all your kindness to me."

"Don't rise, my dear. Sit down;—now do sit down again for a moment," said Miss Prudence, in a rather agitated voice, settling her spectacles. Then she looked at her sister, whose own spectacles had been perfectly straight, but who, in an equally agitated manner, immediately touched them, and so set hers slightly crooked. "My dear! we both feel and have said to each other that all the kindness is on your side, in saving Fido's dear little life; and then in coming here, reviving us, as it were, with your youth and bright face, like spring-time and gladness——"

"And primroses, and birds, and green leaves," put in Miss Patience.

"And memories of our dear old home." Then Miss Silverthorne again looked across and said, "Sister—I wonder if we are thinking of the same thing?"

"Sister, I am sure we are."

"I was wondering if this bright little Daisy would care to spend a few days here in this quiet old-fashioned house."

"So was I—just as a treat to two old-fashioned old maids, who like something young and pretty to look at and warm their hearts with."

"Yes; and, though it would be dull for her, we could ask her brother here as often as she liked," ended the one old human love-bird in a twitter of kindliness.

"And dear Gerald Gascoigne—for we have known him since a boy," ended the other aged love-bird, in a flutter

of pleased anticipation. The tears came quite up into Daisy's big forget-me-not eyes, making them dewily bright as they laughed; though her happy mouth was still silent. The sweet red blood flew to her cheeks, so that instead of Wordsworth's pale

Nun demure, of lowly port,

who had entered Lilac Lodge, it was Burns' daisy, a

Crimson-tipped flower,

who cried out, with all the gladness of drooping hopes reviving:

"You are the two very kindest people in the whole world. Oh, dear! how can I ever thank you enough? Oh, dear me, what shall I say?"

"Say yes," cried both the little old ladies, laughing heartily, but in a gentle, old-fashioned way. They did not laugh in convulsions, like some old people, who seem so to have forgotten mirth that it comes, poor souls! rather awkwardly to them; or, like others, in a heartless tone, as if all the inner kernel of it was dead, and the flavour a past thing; but they laughed still within their whole hearts, but softly, as if time had mellowed their merriment, taking away only the first youthful heat and strength, and leaving it clear and cheering as good wine.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Bless us!" cried the Mayor, "what's that?"
With the Corporation as he sat,
Looking little, though wondrous fat;
Nor brighter was his eye, nor moister,
Than a too-longed-opened oyster.

It was the afternoon before the great ball; the ball of Jack's regiment; it was also (whisper this in a lower key) the day of Captain Gerald Gascoigne's return, for had he not written to Jack Dimity that he hoped to be back just in time to dress and go to it? How Daisy had felt glad as each hour lessened, and the time drew nearer. It was the dinner-hour, in the middle of the day, at Magdala Villa; and the little doctor, who had just returned from two days' absence, was whetting his scythe—that is to say, sharpening a carving-knife—in an ear-splitting fashion, whilst standing up before a huge coarse joint.

"And how has the world wagged with you all since I have been away? Has any young gentleman proposed for any of you girls?" he cried, whilst helping some of his family to wedges, others to hunches of meat, as rapidly as could possibly be; with an eye on some delicate fat for himself, and much more thinly appetising slices. The doctor's joke fell flat; there was no fervent response in the feminine faces around the table. "And how is our charming Miss Dimity?" he went on, looking all around; then giving Daisy a most benignant gleam over his spectacles, reminding her, as when first she came, of a frog about to bless her. "So she is going to leave us to-morrow, and all Marstown and the beaus will be sorrowing. Going back unscathed to her native wilds, like a comet that has shed desolation in its path, leaving broken hearts and ruined hopes behind her, and looking just as she should look, as fresh as a daisy! Eh? What's that you say, my dear Mrs. Cox?"

"The Misses Silverthorne have asked her to stay on a few days at Lilac Lodge," interposed his wife, with a voice as soft as fresh-pressed oil of almonds (Daisy wondered why she made it so very particularly soft) "And the Misses Silverthorne called here yesterday, my dear; you will be glad to hear."

"What—eh—what. *con*found this knife! *What* in the name of goodness do you mean by giving me such a knife?" and the little doctor glared fiercely upon the servant, and spluttered and muttered as if everyone else but himself was responsible for the knives being cold iron instead of best steel, till Daisy secretly thought his manners had not improved; while a faint red tinged his wife's faded cheeks. "So they did themselves the honour to call on us, did they? Well, I suppose since Miss Dimity has scraped acquaintance with them—I beg her pardon, they with her, I should say—that you had better return their call, my dear."

This was very good, considering that to make the old ladies' acquaintance was well known by all his household to have long been a deep desire of the little doctor's heart; and even that he had set several devices on foot to accomplish this, all of which had signally failed. He was plainly seen to be in a disturbed state of mind, though only the home-pilot of his temper, his wife, had foreseen any storm brewing.

"And so you are going to visit those old cats, Miss Dimity? Well, well; I hope you'll like it," with a would-be

cheeriness of tone suggesting that such an event was sadly unlikely. "How long do you stay; though, indeed, very likely being a young lady of a practical turn of mind, you will not leave Marstown now you know its advantages till you have settled yourself for future life. Eh, come now! ha, ha; is that to be the way of it?"

"I only intend to stay a few days with the Misses Silverthorne," replied Daisy, with all the milk of human kindness in her mind frozen into surprised dignity; while her eyes looked at the doctor much as might little Red Ridinghood's at the wolf in grandmamma's bed.

"And I am to go back with her to Elm Hall; so it is a very good thing for me she is staying on a little longer, because my dresses could never have been got ready in time," burst in Fuzzy, red-hot at this juncture, and determined to protect her friend, if she should have to fight for it; though Mrs. Cox only looked politely miserable. She could fight the little doctor for her own brood's sake, with outspread wings at times, but the spirit within her was too crushed by the daily weight of her life's small burdens to rise on behalf of a stranger's child. Yet she nervously kept pressing the salt upon Daisy three times in her anxiety to atone for the doctor's incivility; and surreptitiously poured out another half-glass of Marsala with such an imploring smile that Daisy, though reluctant, would have swallowed poison rather than have grieved her by refusing it.

Dr. Cox's thunderous state became apparently lightened and brightened by either Daisy's or Fuzzy's answers; possibly by both.

"Very civil, very civil, I'm sure, of Mr. and Mrs. Dimity to ask you to Elm Hall, my child," he observed in a grumbling, gratified tone, ignoring Daisy's share in the matter; then, with a sort of gruff jocularity, added, "not, I should suppose, from all accounts, that you will find any gay young sparks you will be wanting to run away with down there. However, none of your young lady friends here will be likely to know that; and they will be dying of envy, according to the charming weakness of your sex, when you write to them from Elm Hall. That's what I always do, when I go out into the country to any swell house. The last time I went to see Lady de Hautenbas' children for measles, I wrote several notes on her coroneted paper, and it quite imposed on everybody—ha, ha, ha!"

None of his hearers responded very warmly, though Pussy and her mother called up feeble smiles. But the doctor cared very little for the opinion of his own womankind, and had apparently grown tired of treating Daisy with the humbug of deference he had first shown to the guest. So he started away on the same topic.

"Elm Hall would not do for our friend Smeeth. He travelled down with me in the train to-day, and the poor old boy was talking to me about his daughters—he! he! he!—consulting me, in fact, about their chances of marrying in Marstown. 'Did I think, now, that Boulogne, or some of those cheap watering-places in summer-time, would be better for getting *rid of them?*' Lord, how I laughed in my sleeve! Getting rid of them! If that's not a capital story for me to go round with at the ball to-night, my name's not Jeremy Cox!"

"Oh, my dear, don't!" softly urged Mrs. Cox in a tone of very real distress. "It would not be kind. Poor Colonel Smeeth may be very silly in saying such things; but it only means that he is a very devoted father, and really anxious for his girls."

"Not kind? Trash!—stuff, my dear! I'll be bound it will be the only time that he ever amused people before. You are too good-natured, and therefore you let yourself be imposed upon. It is the duty of everyone to try to be amusing in society, and make themselves agreeable, unless they are in the bosom of their own family."

And the little doctor, who seemed determined to show himself at his worst, gave, it seemed to Daisy, a covert glance at herself, who had indeed sat singularly silenced during this meal.

"As to caring for his daughters, there is only one of mine who seems to care for me—or who could take the trouble of *writing* to me all that was going on here whilst I was away."

He turned a red expanse of displeased bald brow first upon Fuzzy, then upon Pussy, whose healthy, rosy faces seemed to care very little for his displeasure, however. They knew his bark was worse than his bite; for he was really an over-indulgent father in some ways, and, if cross at times with the elder girls, spoiled Birdie utterly. Also they had grown too much accustomed to hear him talk humbug to other ladies, and to know how he contradicted himself in private, to be very filially sensitive as to his criticisms. But

they both immediately turned and transfixed Birdie with a reproachful, steady gaze. The latter under this treatment grew traitorously red.

"My child, did you write to your father?" asked Mrs. Cox, in a tone of quiet surprise, as if she knew there was more in this than met the eye. "Why, I asked if you would enclose a line when I was writing to him, and you refused."

"Yes, I did. I didn't choose to write like that. I liked to write to him in my own way," answered Birdie, defiantly, now raising her head again.

"And she told me much more gossip and news than you did, my dear. Yours was only full of the cook's having given warning, and the chances of the boys taking whooping-cough at school. Birdie, I think I must give you a silver bangle for being so dutiful," answered the doctor, with a protecting look at his youngest daughter.

"I think we have all had enough," said Mrs. Cox, rising; and putting her arm round Daisy's waist, she swept out of the room with dignity, although she had on her oldest gown of rusty black alpaca. She had assumed again, too, all the sweetness of manner Daisy had remarked on their very first meeting—only now the latter indescribably knew it was more real.

Pussy and Fuzzy followed with their heads also high, and rare indignation in their hearts, leaving the doctor and Birdie together. They signalled to Daisy to come upstairs, and shut themselves into her bedroom, where Mrs. Cox, meekly knowing they went to talk rebellion, would not follow them.

"Silver bangles, indeed! This is what some people get by telling tales," uttered Pussy, with soft viciousness.

"I don't understand what is the matter!" said Daisy, perplexed.

"No wonder," ejaculated Fuzzy, in a rage. "Birdie has, as usual, stolen a march upon us all. She has written to papa that she is unhappy, and is longing for him to come back and protect her from being snubbed by us all, I daresay."

"The fact is, none of her gentlemen friends could stand her temper lately, so they have all deserted her," went on Pussy, with rather pleased malice. "So she is deadly jealous of you, darling; such nonsense, for Smiler Lee never even thought of her! and she thinks you have turned your brother from her, too."

"Indeed, no. But—but Jack, I think, never really liked her better than—than either of you," said poor Daisy, inclined to cry at all this happening on the last day of her visit.

"Of course not—I always thought so," exclaimed Pussy, triumphant.

"You never should have annoyed her, Pussy, by speaking about it," cried Fuzzy, kissing her friend; and then came a knock at the door, and Mrs. Cox's gentle voice—no doubt she had bethought herself, it was better to prevent their anger fermenting.

She had come wishing to see Daisy's ball-dress, she said. All girls know what a flattering request that is; so out Daisy eagerly pulled Madame Furbelow's wonder and glory of creamy, lustrous, satin cobweb-lace, and ghostly thin tulle.

An outcry of astonished admiration followed. None of them had ever seen it before; for Daisy was reticent about her superior possessions. They put it on the famous rejected dummy figure, which was transformed at once from Aunt Sally to Venus; they coveted, admired, thought how to copy it; almost worshipped it. Daisy glowed again with pleasure, quite feeling that, while half their praises were honestly meant for the dress, the rest were meant in atoning warmth and kindness to herself. Sweet is adversity, if it teaches us to know our friends from our backbiters, thought Daisy—which is very well and noble in theory, but perhaps some of us would rather do without the friends than have them with the sauce of adversity.

"But what ornaments are you going to wear with it, my love?" inquired Mrs. Cox, full of consoling generosity. "What! only a string of pearls; no colour? Dear me, I wonder is there anything of mine I could lend you for the night" (reflectively). "Birdie has borrowed my red coral strings, and I have lent Pussy my ivory necklace—it has very handsome pendants, and there is the bog oak one, only, left for you, Fuzzy dear. But," with returning animation, "I could lend Daisy my *large* gold brooch." This was an ornament of bright gold, about the size of a young warming-pan; at the bare proposal of which Daisy shuddered. "I generally wear it myself for night parties; but I can manage instead with the miniature of General Cox, the doctor's father, that you have seen me wearing of an afternoon." (Yes, indeed! every afternoon.) "What need appearances matter for an old woman!"

In the outburst of her benevolence Mrs. Cox was hastening off to fetch the glorious breast-plate, when Fuzzy interposed.

"Nonsense, mamma; it would make Daisy look like a young Zulu chieftainess. It is very handsome for you," with inward dubiousness; "but it would simply spoil her appearance."

"Ah, well! perhaps so. But that brooch is made of the very best yellow gold; it was sent me by my poor dear brother from Australia," ended Mrs. Cox, evidently rather glad not to part with her treasure in spite of her goodness of heart, whilst Daisy silently blessed Fuzzy for delivering her from this terrible golden shield.

"How dismal the room looks with your boxes packed up!" they all exclaimed. "Why did you pack them to-day, Daisy?"

"Because the Misses Silverthorne asked me to have my heavy luggage carried in to Lilac Lodge this evening, for they happened to have a man at work to-day on the premises!"

"Well; and a very good reason too. We know what it is to have only maids in the house," seriously replied Mrs. Cox, as Daisy smiled.

Neither of them could foresee, however, that Daisy would be rather glad that there had been a man that night to carry her boxes out of Magdala Villa.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

And oh, she dances such a way,
No sun upon an Easter Day
Is half so fine a sight.

The great ball was held in the Town Hall.

Such a string of carriages as were before it that night had not been seen in the memory of young Marstown; and no one listened to the "I remembers" of the old about some primæval yeomanry ball or other. Such eager crowds as peeped and pressed round the doorway; such glitter and gleam of swords, flags, and bayonets, in decorations up the grand stairs, and in the great brilliantly-lit ball-room; such hundreds of mirrors, and draped muslin curtains in all conceivable places; such nestling sofas in all inconceivable nooks; such banks of moss, beds of roses, glow of uniforms,

and full-blown fashion in dresses—such a ball, in fact, had never been known in Marstown.

The male guests could be heard observing to each other, in audible asides:

"Oh, come; I say, they have done it this time—haven't they?"

The ladies murmured:

"Isn't it too delightful!"

The Cox party now entered the ball-room; the little fat doctor first, with his wife's arm tucked tight under his elbow—since she could not persuade him that this was no longer the fashion—she herself, a full head and shoulders higher, moving with faded grace at his side.

"He seems clutching his claims to gentility," whispered Jack Dimity.

The Cox girls were in pink, blue, and crimson; whilst Daisy floated among them like a small white cloud, above which was a bewildered little face, that after scarcely seeing Colonel Dunn and Mrs. Luxton, who received them, till Fuzzy gently touched her, tried to descry Jack's face—and one other—among the group of officers farther on.

"Here I am, little one," growled the beloved brotherly voice in her ear. "Jiminy! you do look stunning, though! How much do you cost an inch to-night? My stars and garters! you look so nice, I think I must give you an extra dance."

"Well, I never!—to speak like that to the belle of the ball-room!" put in Smiler Lee, who had eagerly rushed up. "Miss Dimity, give me some dances, do! before all the rest of the men in the room hustle me off. Five of them fell backward with admiration when you sailed into the room like Auror-*er* What-d'ye-call-her! and the others are rushing about frantically, asking to be introduced. Upon my word I'm not chaffing; a dozen asked me your name. I said I didn't know, but I'd try to find out—ho! ho! ho! They'll murder me!—here they come."

A respectable regiment of suitors was indeed seen advancing upon Daisy, their modestly-halting footsteps led by "the two quiet men," Gascoigne's friends in the regiment, who did not personally know Daisy, as they never went into society, but had nevertheless been pounced on as the least self-interested and occupied of the stewards by the eager admirers.

The Smiler now frantically implored for six dances, that,

when shot in a duel for Daisy's sake next morning, he might die happy. But no arguments would make that snowily-frigid young goddess grant more than two, though he hopped about before her in agony. Even when the crowd of worshipping swains stood around, she carefully studied her card, and doled out their awarded dances in condescendingly gracious niggardliness; whilst she gloated anxiously over some blank spaces on her card, and her troubled blue eyes wandered past all the pressing faces, searching the crowded room—in vain!

"Circe and the beasts," murmured the Smiler, who believed he had an apt trick of classical quotations.

Jack drew his handkerchief from the sleeve of his scarlet tunic, up which it was stuffed, with difficulty—the army regulations apparently not considering it necessary that a gentleman should ever want to use it—and subsided behind this into a pæan of mirthful rejoicing over the triumph of the eldest daughter of the Dimities!

The herd of stricken deer moved off with inward, mutual anger and self-distrust, each one believing his chances had been spoiled by the other. The "two quiet men" marched away with an air of bright relief, as feeling, though they did not mean to dance, no one could now say they had not done their duty towards forwarding the wants and wishes of the regiment's guests; and now they both might soon with safe consciences slip off together to smoke, and then show themselves again for supper—before melting away like two drops out of the crowd and returning to peace in the barrack-square, and bed.

"Jack dear, I have kept this first dance for you. Dance it with me, do; I want to talk with you," implored his sister.

"Can't, my child. It's a quadrille, and so I've asked Mrs. Cox herself to open the ball with me;" and, if Jack did not give a wink at his sister, he suggested as much, implying that then the three Misses Cox could not pull each other's hair about him.

"Well, then, the second," looking about with a desperate eye, and relinquishing hoarded treasure number one, not seeing her Prince Perfect to claim it.

"I don't mind that," answered Jack, with sweet condescension.

The Smiler screwed his face up into a comical, silent whistle, meant to express for Daisy's benefit—who did not care what he thought of her Jack's fraternal behaviour:

"If I had a sister——!

Still wonderingly Daisy's eyes searched the room with its kaleidoscopic, ever-shifting groups, and mazy quadrille figures, in vain, in vain looking for one tall figure and reddish-brown head! She found herself beginning the ball with a youth much smitten by her charms, the son of a great county baronet; but hardly knew with whom she was dancing, and certainly as little cared.

"Hallo, you did get a swell," said Jack, coming up to quiz her when his turn came, but with a highly-gratified look. "Do you know that is the eldest son; he has just gone into the 2nd Life Guards. You are flying high to-night. At this rate, when Polly comes out, as she always wants to outdo you, you little simpleton, she'll be trying for some old mummy of a duke, that her name may be embalmed for evermore in the peerage."

"I did not know who he was," said Daisy, absently gazing after her departing partner. "He is very like a half-fledged young canary."

Then after a turn or two, during which Jack showed to the admiring gaze of the room how two Dimities could dance with infinite satisfaction: "By-the-way, Jack, why is your friend, Captain Gascoigne, not here?"

"Because he never came back at all!"

A blank seemed to come upon the ball; a great sheet of blankness, as it were, on Daisy's mind, blotting out all the anticipated happiness of this night of nights! Everything seemed a void, she herself felt hollow, as those only do who have lost all heart. What were these people all dancing for in such a mock-mirthful fashion? It seemed to her as if they could not be *really* enjoying themselves any more than herself; though of course the thoughtless throng might believe that she was utterly gay, too, because her card was filled with names, that were the deadest sounding names in the world to her. A long, long time seemed to have passed in that blank, when—and then really she knew it to be only a minute or two later—Jack grumpily uttered, in a disgusted tone:

"I do think it is too bad of old Gascoigne. He told me he was certain to come back for *our* ball! Anyhow, he can't stay longer than to-morrow; his leave is up then, so he might as well have made a struggle and come back for to-night."

He must come back to-morrow! As the sun in April's strange scene-shiftings will suddenly peer out from behind a rain-cloud, and unexpectedly flood the landscape with light, beauty, gladness, and the outbursting melody of birds, so was it in Daisy's spring-like heart. Begone, dull care! Why be sad any longer, for *he must come back to-morrow.* Life is short, grief is long; why grieve five minutes longer than we need? Remember he will be here again to-morrow. Much as the clock ticks, so the heart thinks—to this side, to that side—gladness! sorrow! Clang—clash—clir-r-r! Another dance had begun; but Daisy felt gayer than a few seconds ago would have seemed possible. The rebound of relief after the first blow had been all the greater compared with that first blankness of desolation. Now all her thought and vague hopes were no longer centred on to-night, but on to-morrow.

> Ah! demain, c'est la grande chose!
> De quoi demain sera-t-il fait?
> L'homme aujourd'hui sème la cause,
> Demain Dieu fait mûrir l'effet.

Does this verse seem too grand to be connected with the simple love and disappointment of a homely little country maiden, an "unassuming commonplace of Nature"?

But, after all, most of us are commonplace; and many, after just such a night of light-footed waltzing as Daisy's, may have solemn enough morrows. She did plainly right now in trying her best to be cheerful and pleasing again, so that her next partners thought her as bright a little cricket as ever they had met. With curious logic, she even told herself it was perhaps just as well Captain Gascoigne had not come for the great ball, since Jack would have been quite vexed if she had not made herself agreeable to all his friends. And—she *could* not had Gascoigne been there!

She could not have helped watching him, when possible, and thinking of him the whole time; wondering what he could be saying to other people, and what he would say to herself. So now she watched the door no more, but gave herself up to enjoying the ball as heartily, but not as ecstatically, as those do who have no all-engrossing idea.

"Glorious, isn't it?" panted the Smiler, as he and Daisy flew down the great room, in a polka, like harmless lightning; zigzagging hither and thither at tremendous speed, but with all his energies at frightful tension to avoid that terrible disgrace of bumping other couples. "I say—between ourselves,

you know—don't you think they'll talk of this ball of ours in Marstown for many a long day?"

Daisy was sure of it. "And I hear you worked the hardest of all about it yourself."

"Work! I believe you. Now, do I look as if I had never been in bed at all last night; no? It's a fact, though. Couldn't sleep, knowing they were washing the floor here. And then, the wretches might have ruined us by putting on too much chalk; so I came down every hour to see how they were getting on. For, you see, I had undertaken to see about it, and when once *I* say that, I'm not a man to go to sleep over a thing. I suppose the world would say it was very foolish. Come, what do you think?"

"Very foolish," echoed Daisy in an absent tone, hardly understanding a word of all his little—justly-earned—self-tribute of praise. Lee stopped, and held by the tip of one of his well-waxed moustaches in his surprise; then a good-humoured smile broke over his face, despite feeling snubbed. His eyes had followed the track of Daisy's, and had seen—

"Why, there is Gascoigne arrived, after all," he exclaimed, looking where a welcoming group stood around the better-late-than-never new-comer, evidently listening with interest and questioning to some unusual explanation he was giving. "Let us go over there, and hear what kept him."

(This was, indeed, good-fellowship towards his comrade, since we all know it is often so hard for men to tell what some women *can* see in other men!)

As they approached, Daisy now hesitating very much, and rather wishing she were in the background, Gascoigne came to meet them, with rather eager eyes, but a quietly self-possessed step.

"Well, Miss Dimity, you promised me two dances at our ball—I hope you have kept them?"

"Why, it is nearly all over! How could one know you were really coming."

Daisy's eyes opened wide, bewildered by his calm claim, which at once put her in the wrong; bitterly disappointed to think of the so-long-hoarded dances for him, so lately given to any poor stop-gap of an applicant.

"I said I was coming, if it were at all possible," and Gascoigne looked back at her with a steady eye that sent secret reproach into Daisy's inmost soul. She had meant to be so loyal, and now seemed to have been disloyal. Her mind was so completely given up to him that her conscience,

which really ought to have been blameless, began perplexedly to feel that she must have treated him very badly indeed. But she could only look down at her card, and then look up at him blankly, without finding a word to say in self-excuse.

"Oh, well; no luck for me, I see, to-night. Can't be helped. It was not my fault that I came late though." And Gerald drew himself up to his tallest height, with a smile that was rather hurt, and a shrug that was thoroughly gentlemanlike; and both would have reduced Daisy to further despair, but that she heard Jack's blessed bassoon in her ear.

"I say, why can't you give him my other dance, and let me make some other young woman happy? It's not such a Sunday-come-once-a-fortnight treat for you and me to dance together. And look here" (to Gascoigne), "what did happen? Did you miss your train, or have a smash on the line?"

"No," replied Gascoigne, in his slow, soft voice; "but I was so delayed by some business that I could not catch the mail to come down here; and all I could do was to get on a goods train as far as Sleepyvale, and then take the old-fashioned coach."

"Good man."

"Well, I'd rather it was you than me. I know that old coach breaks down three times a week."

"Yes; but then he wanted to be in time for *our ball*," exclaimed the bystanders.

"The coach did break down," went on Gascoigne calmly. "We had only gone three miles when the axle-tree broke coming down a hill, and we were sent flying eighteen feet over a hedge. Luckily only one man's shoulder was put out. The inside passengers were more frightened than hurt, but they were all in a pigeon pie on the top of each other. You never saw such a squash."

"And how did you get back?" asked everyone. "Not on foot? Impossible!"

"Every step of the way," smiled Gascoigne. "Young de Hautenbas was driving by, and offered me a lift in his dog-cart just then, but I had lost two valuable things in the scrimmage, a book and a—a flower; and would not stir an inch till they were found."

"A book!—a flower?" jibed Lee and Jack alternately, in astonishment. "Could you not get another book at Mudie's? And a flower at Covent Garden? Blessed if we should have refused a lift for either!"

"It was not an ordinary flower. It was a valuable—

well, *plant*, that I was bringing down for a lady," evasively answered Gascoigne, with an air of regret. (Daisy's eyes, half-raised to peep from under their modest eyelashes in a twinkle of jealousy, met his eyes unexpectedly looking fully at her face. She felt ashamed of her momentary pang.) He went on: "Unfortunately, though I stormed and searched, it never was found, although the book was. It was a family thing."

"What—the flower or the book?" laughed Jack.

"Oh, the book!" answered Gascoigne, but in a confused way, still eyeing Daisy. "My old uncle is a bit of a bibliographer, and, as thanks for some business I did for him, he gave me an Aldine Virgil, the rare edition of 1501, too."

"What! a genuine Aldo Manuzio? Oh! where did you find it again?" cried Una Goodchild excitedly, who was on Jack's arm.

"I found it tucked tight under an old lady's shawl. She was hysterically convinced it was her family Bible."

"Was it worth the walk you had?" irreverently asked Lee and Dimity.

"Oh, it must have been worth *any trouble!*" uttered Una, at the same moment.

The trio immediately began a triangular battle of books. But Daisy seized this first chance of speaking to Gascoigne unregarded, to murmur softly and shyly, as he bent down his ear to hear what she said so low:

"*And have you—have you had no dinner?*"

Gascoigne nearly laughed outright as he smiled down upon her—but not quite. She might have been hurt, and he was a gentleman. But he was charmed with her question, being a man, and the tenderly-engaging small anxiety with which it was put. He understood so well the solicitude for him which prompted it, and the sweet, homely nature that looked upon taking thought for the comfort of her friends as her especial duty. As she blushed under his keen gaze, he said in a tone of hearty re-assurance that—(for her dear sake!)—he would not starve just yet.

"It does not matter. I was *determined* to come to the ball; and there will be time for some supper before our dance together comes."

And away he went, at Daisy's suggestion—but why should he have turned off so immediately?—that was so vexingly like a man! and soon, gazing from afar, she saw him in the

fairy grotto of a supper-room, sitting at a tiny mushroom-like table, with his two "quiet" friends, all three laughing, eating plovers' eggs, and quaffing dry champagne, as if the great ball had lost all its horrors for *them*, its sweet romance for *him*. Daisy felt it would have been quite impossible to her to eat anything, after the intoxicating happiness of seeing him again.

CHAPTER XL.

Now sleeps the crimson petal, near the white;
Nor waves the cypress in the palace walk;
Nor winks the gold fin in the porphyry font:
The fire-fly wakens; waken thou with me.

It was the sweetest little bower ever whispered in, where they two sat. Tall, palm-like shrubs met overhead in scented semi-darkness, white roses glimmered, crimson passion-flowers glowed in the warm gloom. A tiny fountain played beside them, its tinkling drops falling on their bewitched hearing like "tiny silver bells upon the robes of hovering silence." Gold-fish darted in and out among the water-lilies in the basin. They saw it all, but only looked at each other; and only seemed to hear the unspoken thoughts they interchanged.

Their one thrilling dance was over, and Gascoigne had led away his little partner here, pressing her arm a little closer than usual to his side, looking down at her twice with a proud, pleased look, as if she already belonged to him: while she—earth did not seem earth, but paradise, in which they two only now sat and looked in each other's eyes and said—very little. Then Gascoigne spoke: "So you are not leaving us yet awhile, after all. I am so glad—I hurried back here fearing you would be gone to-morrow?"

"But I am so sorry you should have hurried back on my account." This was uttered in a small voice, shy as small. Gascoigne smiled upon her, so that she bent down a modest brown head, hiding her face like her namesake at night, and only showing a warm tinged cheek.

It is such sweet dalliance, he thinks to himself, he will not say just yet—not just yet—the words that he came back meaning to say, and that are even now on his tongue. Some inward start of maiden shyness makes her hurriedly speak and break the silence, and why! she hardly knows, nor what she is saying.

"You have not admired my dress; is it not pretty?—tell me," with a pigmy attempt at defiance of their mutual strange shyness.

Gascoigne rather sentimentally utters: "'In gloss of satin and glimmer of pearl.' You could not look nicer even in a common print frock, as I saw you that first afternoon—do you remember? But the 'queen lily and rose' hardly apply to you," in a tone of fond appraising. "How I do wish I had not lost that flower this evening—— !"

"Can you not be happy without thinking of a stupid plant?" burst from little Daisy, almost unawares, so suddenly had he dropped a spark upon what modicum of fiery spirit she possessed. "I beg your pardon; indeed, I do; but surely you might forget it now—with your friends."

"I meant that flower for you, Miss Dimity."

"For me?"

"Yes, if you would have deigned to accept it. You might even have worn it to-night. No, I forgot! There would not have been time to have offered it beforehand."

"Oh, but you might have sent it—just to see if I would," coquettishly. "Why do you shake your head and laugh? What colour was it—white?"

"Well, upon my word I don't know that it was any colour at all—at least, it sometimes looked all colours."

"What an extraordinary flower! It has some horrible Latin name, of course, like Robinsonii, or——"

"Well, no. It has a very simple old English name, that means Day's Eye, I believe."

Daisy opened her own eyes rather wide at this. Gascoigne went on, laughing at her puzzled state.

"You remind me of what Wordsworth called your namesake,

> A little Cyclops, with one eye,
> Staring to threaten or defy.

And if you had worn that great brooch of Mrs. Cox's you were telling me of just now, he would have described you as

> A silver shield with boss of gold
> That spreads itself, some fairy bold
> In fight to cover.

Yes; I certainly wish I had not lost my flower—my foreign daisy," went on Gerald, with a man's power of being able to regret, or feel glad of more tangible sublunary matters than love's young dream, even in the very midst and rapture of

its bewitchingly sweet spell. "When I left my old uncle's Vicarage of Barleyfields this morning, I little thought——"

"Barleyfields—a vicarage! What is your uncle's name?" ejaculated Daisy, with such an astonished look that Gascoigne, equally astonished, answered only, "Brownrigg."

"Oh! that is not the name. At least, I cannot quite remember what the name of *his* uncle was. There was someone I used to know who used to talk to me of staying at Barleyfields—yes, at the vicarage."

"Someone?—a 'he,' you said—a young man?" with growing surprise, just tinged with jealous suspicion.

"Well, yes—at least, I—I thought him quite a young man then—but you, perhaps," hesitatingly, "might call him a boy."

"Hardly likely. No, Miss Dimity, it is generally your sex who are so fond of using the term; and very often I am afraid it is supposed to excuse their flirtations with some very full-grown young men. They say, 'Oh! he is only a boy—such a dear boy!' However, your friend, you own, was a young man, and I give you credit for saying so. An admirer, I suppose?" and Gascoigne spoke with an assumption of righteous severity, quite unusual with him, against the sex; and an undertone of dawning, unreasonable anger against the supposed admirer. Daisy flushed crimson, as he could see even in the scented dusk caused by the tall plants round them, and she looked down shamefaced.

"I don't know why you should say so—it is not very kind of you, I think" (in her nervousness being aware of his displeasure, and trying to defend herself meekly). "Of course he *liked* me; at least—he said he did."

"Pray do not imagine I think it a *crime* that you should have an admirer;" then, with a rather doubting smile, "only if this *he* happened to be one of the young Dicksons, my uncle's other two nephews, I should hardly advise you to place too much confidence in the affections of such young men. I don't wish to hurt your feelings——"

"No, no, go on; please say whatever you like."

"Well, then, it seems ungenerous to disparage them, as I am supposed to be their successful rival in my old uncle's affections. (That seems hard, too, as he has no children, and I happen to be a little better off than they are!) But even if one of them has been fortunate enough to be beforehand with me in—in your good opinion, Miss Dimity, it is

not a perhaps natural jealousy that makes me warn you . . . I mean," speaking very earnestly, but stammering a good deal, "perhaps you do not know that my uncle has just been obliged to send Phil out to New Zealand, and that Theodore is—well, no one quite knows where just at present. Did you hear that?"

"I never heard of the two Mr. Dicksons before in my life, Captain Gascoigne."

"*What!* Oh, I see; you have been making game of me about them all this time while I was speaking."

And, though he spoke very gently, Gerald became a fine red all over his face, that made his honest nose look delightfully ugly. Daisy eyed him sideways, and thought it was such a nice big nose, and was quite flattered that she could make her Sir Perfect almost in a rage—though sorry too. Still she pretended to answer in such a soft huff as a lamb or a pigeon might show when properly offended.

"I beg your pardon, but I did not know what you were going to say. It was not my fault that you thought I meant either of your cousins. Dickson was not the name at all."

"Not! (joyfully). Why, then, whom can you mean? Not young Tabuteau—the doctor's son, with the lame leg; or old Ridley, the hunting squarson (*i.e.* squire and parson). I know no one else there." Then, in remembering contrition: "But I am ashamed of myself. I was quite forgetting how very presuming it is to inquire into what a lady may not wish to tell. Please forgive me. Only——"

"Only what, Captain Gascoigne?"

"That, as he said he liked you—at which I am not at all surprised—I should like to know (with a considerable effort) whether you liked him equally well?"

"Yes, indeed I did!" and up Daisy looked again in animated simplicity. "I was very fond of him."

"Fond of him; this gentleman?" asked Gascoigne, in a very subdued tone, she thought. "When a young lady says that, it might be taken to mean, Miss Dimity—excuse me if I should not ask the question—but, are you engaged to him?" His tone was so full of meaning that Daisy blushed furiously. She put up her white, mysteriously-given fan, and put it down, and began twitching all her pretty ribbons straight; then she laughed.

"Oh, I—oh, no! He did ask me certainly to marry him some time or other, and I said yes. But it was all nonsense."

"All nonsense! When he asked you to marry him and you said yes?" uttered Gascoigne, sitting up straight and looking at her in indignation, astonishment, and almost scorn. "Miss Dimity, I did not think you were like so many young ladies of the present day, who seem to consider an engagement only binding when they can make no better. I did not think that you would have promised yourself to this unknown man, or any man, and then have said it was all nonsense."

"But, indeed, Captain Gascoigne, it was! for we were both so young."

"And," continued Gerald, mighty in his hurt wrath and great disappointment in this his supposed innocent field-flower; unheeding her now imploring looks to listen to her story, her piteous, last small effort in self-defence,—"and I *did* think that, knowing you were engaged to this other man, you might have told me so—before now;" and up he rose straight, as if to go, seeming, in Daisy's misty eyes, so grand and noble! quite a king among the herd of common men—except that her sight was so dim and ever dimmer she could hardly see him again till two iris-hued tears had rolled slowly down. But, though Gascoigne had risen, Daisy did not rise. Instead she gasped, "Captain Gascoigne——"

"Yes, Miss Dimity," answered Gerald, in a hard, frozen tone, with his head stiffly averted. "What is it?"

"Am I really engaged? Because"—then slyly, as he turned in astonished doubt—"I don't think I really can be."

"You are *not*! And why—because you broke it off——?"

"Because I—I—don't laugh at me, please—I was only twelve years old!"

Gerald did not obey her for once. He looked at her baby-face still upturned beseechingly; at the two tears undried; and then went into a great laugh. After which, sitting down again beside her on the little sofa in the dim recess, he laughed again, but very softly; and as much at himself as at her apparently.

"Don't," said Daisy, twisting away her head with a very pretty turn of a dimpled shoulder, and a pout expressed as it were in her voice.

"Don't what, Miss Daisy?"

"Don't tease me—by laughing at me."

"Very well; I won't tease you any more, if you will only tell me whether—since you are not irretrievably engaged——"

Gascoigne paused an instant as he was softly speaking;

he and Daisy had somehow drawn nearer each other; the fountain gurgled laughingly in its cunningly contrived nook, among the palms that seemed whispering to each other of "vegetable loves," as a little night-breeze swayed their fronds—and the dim white flowers massed around appeared to nod at their little, white, human sister in confiding encouragement. Daisy tried to look up, but could not, so looked down; her lips would fain have framed some soft expostulation, but could only quiver, as Gascoigne, pausing, looked in her face and put out his hand as if to take her little one. It was almost in his grasp, as he still more tenderly repeated, "Whether you could ever like me well enough——"

There came a rustle approaching, a cackling laugh, and a bald head peered past the screening boscage, exclaiming, "What's here? Anything nice going on here, eh? Anything good to be had? Why, bless my soul! I didn't think it was . . . It *is* Captain Gascoigne and Miss Dimity!"

And Dr. Cox, coming more fully into view, stood and gazed upon the abashed couple; arranging his spectacles to examine their looks with the air of a friendly, family medicine-man, who had learnt from their pulse something was wrong, and who had known their constitution since birth. His daughter Birdie hung upon his arm, pretending to draw back with shyness, but looking malignant-eyed from under her eyelashes all the same.

"It absolutely is Miss Dimity and our friend Gascoigne!" repeated the worthy-looking old spoil-sport. "I said to my Birdie here, as she was not dancing, that we would just make a little tour of inspection round the pretty spooneries, as I call these charming spots, ha! ha! little thinking we should stumble on two such friends. What a cosy little party we make, eh? But perhaps there is no more room, is there?"

"Oh, yes! certainly, Doctor Cox; pray sit down," uttered Gascoigne, with very forced politeness, wishing him at Magdala Villa with all his heart. "There is room enough for everyone."

"But perhaps we are not wanted all the same, pa," giggled Birdie significantly, pinching his arm. "Didn't I tell you so, when you began poking round?"

"What, bless my heart! but you said if any couples were spooning, my child. Do they want us to go, do you think? . . . What, eh, not?" as rather unhappy gestures of dissent

were forced from the inspected pair. "Now, now, Birdie, what am I to do between you?"—for his playful daughter affectedly caught him by the coat-tails, as if to drag him away. "Come now, I'll just put it to themselves. My dear people, *were you spooning?*"

A scornful "No!" escaped from Gascoigne. Goodness forgive him the story! but if, as Sir Walter Scott declared, a fib is permissible on some occasions to screen one from impudent questions, surely to shield poor Daisy, who could not speak, was such an occasion. Besides, "spooning" is an unrefined verb, and scarcely expressed his feelings.

"There, there! I told you so, Birdie; I knew our friend Gascoigne would be glad to have us;" whereupon the doctor tucked up his coat-tails carefully, and plumped down in the vacant space on the other side of Gerald, whom he proceeded to interview upon the subject of his recent absence. Whilst Gascoigne replied as briefly as civility would allow, Birdie Cox took the place Daisy had made for her beside herself—as ungrudgingly as she could—with ungraciousness.

"Are you engaged for any more dances?" she asked, in an unpleasant undertone.

"Yes; for all, to-night. Are you not?" Daisy quietly answered.

"No, I'm not. You might know that much, I should think, when you see me here!" snapped Birdie, so viciously that Daisy really drew back instinctively, as if she were likely to get bitten. "No! nobody has chosen to ask me for the next five dances but Mr. Hunt and Mr. Blount; whom I've had each already three times. But if you think I'm going to dance any more with those stupid owls, and be satisfied with your cast-offs, let me tell you, Miss Daisy, you are *very* much mistaken!"

And Birdie, who was plainly "in a temper" (not a good one!), gazed at her whilom dearest friend with blazing eyes; whilst poor Daisy, unused to such outbreaks, was racking her brain to think what was *the reason* of herself being thus apparently accused for the neglect of Miss Cox by better partners, and the consequent good luck of Castor and Pollux. She might have puzzled herself long enough—since reason Birdie had none.

But Gascoigne now rose, with a ghastly smile of courteousness in answer to the doctor's last sallies; vainly hoping to retreat with his small sweetheart to peace elsewhere.

"You are not going——" Up bounced the doctor, too. "Why, I had a hundred other questions to ask you."

"Another time I shall be most happy," murmured the victim; "but at present will you excuse——" He had got Daisy now safe upon his arm.

"Dear, dear; but wait one moment. There is no hurry! and I wanted particularly to ask you something." Hereupon the doctor, attempting to buttonhole his retreating prey, had to content himself with getting a small scarlet scrap of uniform between his finger and thumb, with difficulty.

Gascoigne, always as gravely polite as a Spanish hidalgo, stopped still to listen, not betraying a motion of impatience; though his every muscle was twitching under the annoyance; as the doctor fumbled on, "I wanted to ask—ah, ah—what were the crops like in your part of the country?"

"Papa!" called out Birdie sharply from behind them, where she still sat glaring resentfully at Gascoigne's retreating back, for she had expected him to ask her for the next dance, "papa, I feel extremely ill, and I must go home immediately."

"Ill?—my favourite!" and the doctor hopped round like Punch when pretending to be extremely startled.

"Ill?" echoed good-natured Gascoigne, with sudden concern. "What is the matter? Let me bring you some water."

"Water!" . . . sneered the invalid, biting severely at her lace handkerchief, and looking at him as if he had proposed to insult her.

"Wine, then? But you are not faint?" And the bewildered man gazed inquiringly at her countenance, which even by the gleam of a Chinese lantern overhead he could see was growing of a peony hue; whilst he could not think why Daisy, usually ever ready—and even the afflicted parent—were so tardy in their offers of sympathy and help.

To his horror, the young lady drummed her heels on the ground at him, gasping out:

"Bother! . . . Just leave me alone, Captain Gascoigne. That's all I ask you to do! You could not ask me to dance, or see after my amusement in any way to-night; and now you stand there like a stupid long stick, pretending you are sorry, forsooth!"

"But I really am sorry," returned Gascoigne slowly; bearing that test of a true gentleman, how he takes being

snubbed by a lady, with such unflinching courtesy that he seemed a latter-day "perfect knight" to a pair of blue eyes turned on him in secret worshipping. "I am engaged to your eldest sister for the next dance," he continued, "but will you allow me to have another one later on; or may I try to get you some partners?"

Miss Cox the youngest laughed in hysterical derision, ending with a sort of sniff.

"Indeed, I shall not! If you think you can have me come for being whistled to whenever you please, like some other people, you are very much mistaken"—glancing with scorn and sarcasm at her rival, who stood by feeling as small and meek as a mouse. "You don't know my spirit! I'm going home at once, and all the rest of them must just come too."

"But, Birdie, my child! Baby, my sweet one!" wheedled the doctor, in a weak, coaxing tone, being evidently in a ridiculous fright of the said spirit of his daughter. "Come, come; you don't mean it. I'll take you home myself if you really wish it, but the rest are all dancing, you know——"

"And do you really think I'm going home by myself, and leave them all to enjoy themselves?" blazed out Birdie, at white heat; tossing about the sofa-cushions till all three gazers thought she meant to fling them at their heads. "*Will* you go and tell mamma to bring out the other girls immediately? There!—what's the use of your standing looking at me?"

The doctor turned, and fled before her last glance as fast as his short legs could carry him.

"Slowly and sadly" Gascoigne and Daisy followed together, in readiness to support the distempered damsel, who went in front with heaving breast, and an eye which showed she would permit no such trifling with her outraged feelings as the offer of an arm, or any mock-sympathy, before she deigned to consider herself in need of such assistance. Near the ball-room door they found Mrs. Cox and Fuzzy, with wobegone faces awaiting them. The mother made a pretence at once of seeing to the supposed indisposition of her daughter; who, sinking on a seat, in a studied attitude of pretty prostration, put her hand under her cheek and begged for smelling-salts.

"Isn't it too bad?" whispered Fuzzy, coming up, with sincere apologies to Daisy. "Pussy and I were enjoying

ourselves, too, so much more than we expected after—*those others* had gone, you know." (Major Hodge and Mr. Jones, no doubt.) "And mamma is so angry that she wanted to put Birdie in a cab and send her home alone, because she has been jealous and cross all evening; but papa says we must pretend she really is ill for the sake of appearances. But, most of all, I am sorry for you, dear." Her frank sympathy so warmed Daisy that the latter exclaimed, with prompt responding friendship:

"Don't trouble yourself about me. Let us all go back —poor thing! I am so sorry she has been vexed."

But Fuzzy turned, unsatisfied still, to express her regret to Jack Dimity and Smiler Lee, who came up just then.

"Oh, don't fret yourself about Daisy," said Jack bluntly; who seemed to have been hanging about, and so had an inkling of how matters stood, adding, with an encouraging nod in his sister's direction, "she's so good-natured, she rather likes making an *auto-da-fé* of herself for other people to warm their feet at."

"What! the ball-room belle to be carried off so early!" Thus the Smiler, who did *not* understand how the wind blew, was lamenting loudly aside to the said belle "You looked, excuse my saying so, won't you?—but you did look such a White Angel to-night. Was she not the belle of the night, Gascoigne?" turning for confirmation of his effusiveness of speech.

"Yes," said Gascoigne, briefly but to the point; adding, much lower, "though what I admired most was her sweetness of temper, that was not merely put on, like a new dress."

With what glad, grateful eyes Daisy looked up just one moment, and met his looking down in return, with an expression that made hers fall, and her heart go pit-a-pat! And now the little doctor, who had been frantically dodging round the outskirts of the ball-room, trying to stop Pussy and her partner, who, scenting danger, had been waltzing round and round from him, returned hot and annoyed with the last unwilling and indignant sister—(of charity?)—on his arm; representing to all who offered inquiries or expostulations that his girls' feelings for their invalid made them only anxious to go away and see after her.

"To whip her and put her to bed, I should say," remarked Essie Smeeth, in a high, disbelieving tone. "Well, if I had a sister like that, I'd teach her better manners."

As they got into a fly and drove off, Daisy last saw a row of interested faces gazing after them from the flag-lined doorway; the two Smeeth girls and some other friends, who had been "sitting out" with their partners, peeping with amusement mingled with pity; on the steps outside, Gascoigne, Lee, and Jack, looking after them with regret and vexation—which the still unenlightened Smiler, indeed, was loudly expressing by uplifting his voice in lamentation, despite of hints and nudges from either side.

CHAPTER XLI.

KATH. A pretty peat! 'tis best put finger in the eye—an she knew why.

NOT a word was exchanged amongst the Cox family in the fly. But, after some minutes of ominous silence, Mrs. Cox, with a pained civility and kindness quite irksome to Daisy, began gently hoping the latter was not tired. Upon this Birdie at once burst into loud sobbing; observing parenthetically that nobody, not even her own mother, cared about her feelings—to which the rest of her family, by their silence, seemed to give consent.

The doctor, wily parent, was outside on the box beside the driver, smoking away like a factory chimney, having observed aloud with much inner thankfulness, "that there was no room for him inside"—as there truly was not, since there they were already five.

Arrived home, Daisy, feeling that a household storm had been brewing during the late dreadful stillness, slipped upstairs to her little nest; as the room seemed, which, for its associations with all her new experiences and thoughts in Marstown, she already felt quite sorry to leave—so had her clinging nature already there struck root. She heard a hum of voices below, swelling soon into an angry female clamour; but knew the doctor had basely evaded all this by scuttling—no other word could better express his sidling, crab-like trot—as hastily as possible to his dressing-room.

Daisy was very sleepy, and there stood the great stuffed figure, like an automaton maid. She took off her beautiful gown and hung it over the said "Miss Black," to keep it uncrushed; and soon having forgiven Birdie, and all others who had vexed her, lay down with an innocent mind and happy heart, thinking of—one person. Soon she was

dreaming of this said one person; had perhaps been dreaming of him an hour; but her sleeping ideas had grown oppressed, disturbed. It seemed that Gascoigne was being dragged from her side by Birdie: that the latter was shrieking in hysterics and calling on him to leave Daisy evermore for herself, that he seemed going—going sadly! but going! She herself tried to cry out imploringly to him, yet felt so choked she could not. . . . Why, now! she heard loud wedding-bells for him and Birdie, clanging, clashing in her dream-miseried ears. Daisy awoke with a great start; heard a loud ringing indeed in the darkness—and springing out of bed, bewildered, opened the door. She saw Fuzzy in her night-gown, ringing the big dinner-bell, and calling Fire! Fire! whilst a cloud of smoke came rolling up the stairs.

CHAPTER XLII.

Thus must I from the smoke into the smother.

Then there was confusion in the darkness of the little villa!

Matches were tried to be struck, and would not strike, or the match-box got lost; clothes were groped after; aimless wild haste and bewilderment prevailing among most. The two servant-maids clung together on the stairs, impeding progress; and interchanging shrieks and responses from the Litany. Mrs. Cox fled upstairs like a white ghost, not knowing the extent of the danger, but only thinking of saving her little schoolboys and getting them dressed, regardless of later considerations.

The doctor, half-dressed, and almost wholly frantic, was popping out from his dressing-room on to the landing and popping back.

"Save yourselves!" he kept croaking, like a bull-frog gone hoarse with over-excitement. "Don't mind the furniture! Thank heavens! it's all only just insured. Save yourselves, my darlings!"

Whereupon he ran a few steps down the stairs in his shirt-sleeves, then ran back again to secure his watch, a cat's-eye pin set in small diamonds—the gift of a grateful patient, which he greatly valued—and some ready money. With these in both hands he fled from the house bare-headed, shouting "Police!" down the empty darkness of the Khyber Pass Road, whilst the inrushing draught from the open door

he had left behind him was not a help to the salvation of his family.

Meanwhile Fuzzy, as if possessed by the spirit of ten housemaids, was carrying great jugs of water to throw on the fire that seemed bursting out of the kitchen, and spreading on that side of the house.

"We must keep the stairs wet; don't you think so?" she breathlessly said to Daisy, who was close behind her, working as Fuzzy bade with steady, honest courage, though in her heart she had no faith in their quenching the flames any more than if they were to play a fountain into Vesuvius.

But she felt that was none of her business; and not having a genius for taking the lead in emergency, obedience to others was her natural duty.

Both girls, nevertheless, by their encouraging example and words, had so wrought upon the servant-maids that these were soon willingly helping in handing down water from the little bath-room, which luckily they could still get at.

"Oh, lawk!" exclaimed simple Susan, the cook, with a cry of dismay, "Miss Fuzzy, do stop; that's the *hot-water* tap, my dear! It'll help the fire!"

Upstairs Pussy, with natural calmness, was busily engaged throwing open her wardrobe and drawers, and flinging their indiscriminate contents into her sheets, which she had torn off her bed for that purpose and then knotted together by the four corners, preparatory to pitching them, if necessary, out of the window. Her own best clothes and boots, then even all her second best thus saved, she began with sisterly thought to take the same prudent care for Fuzzy's worldly goods.

Luckily (in this firelight view of the case), the small possessions of both sisters consisted mainly of clothes; for they had few or none of either books or trinkets, all the many knick-knacks and little Lares that young ladies with more extensively cultivated tastes so often accumulate.

All this had occupied but a few minutes, thus what with the excitement and calling to each other, those below stairs had entirely failed to hear cries from Birdie's room, which Pussy had calmly disregarded, supposing them to proceed merely from hysterics, which sisterly weakness she did not intend should divert her from the pressing nature of her business.

But now the screams had become ear-piercing. Like-

wise, amidst all the din, a battering could be heard against the inner side of Birdie's door that arrested attention.

"What is it?" they shrieked, hardly pausing in their work.

"Let me out; I'm locked in! I'm locked in!" came back in tones of shrill fear.

"Well, you've got the key. Can't you open the door?" retorted Fuzzy, in an equally sharp screech.

She was not unkind, but excited to highest pitch, feeling scorched, as she had ventured nearest of all to the fire, and in no mood therefore to bear with silly helplessness.

But the answer almost paralysed her.

"I've got the key, but it *won't open the door!* I've tried and tried, and screamed to you all, but it won't; and, oh, my goodness, I'll be burnt alive!"

Upon which Birdie uttered shrieks, as if already roasting, that turned the women outside white with fear. As Fuzzy whispered, she had run upstairs to escape scolding, and locked herself in to prevent pursuit; and, no doubt, had done so in such a rage, the key was very possibly injured. They clustered round her door, leaving their efforts against the fire to helping hands, which even whilst Birdie spoke had appeared, in the marvellous way men do arrive for a fire; some passers-by, a few from the neighbouring villas. These Mrs. Cox was now directing, pale and composed, with a quilt draped gracefully around her—being the first thing she could snatch up, for she dared not even return to take her dressing-gown. Thus, with one arm outstretched in continual command, she rather resembled a white statue of Fame, pointing onwards to victory.

A cross-fire of advice, exhortations, and laments outside Birdie's door, only seemed to drive the victim inside to desperation, who now would do nothing but shake the door; knocking and pushing against the wood as if in blind frenzy.

Daisy, who was coolest of all, could hear with dismay the men muttering to each other that the fire was a bad business, and the engines would be long in coming. Fuzzy and Pussy had now lost their heads, and were imploring their sister to throw her mattress out of the window and jump down upon it; a plan saying something for their fertility of resource, but which Birdie, with distracted "No, no, no's!" refused to attempt—which perhaps said more for her sense.

The maids, keeping up a chorus of pity to each of

Birdie's shrieks, had dissolved into such floods of tears they seemed resolved to extinguish the flames merely from their own private resources.

Down knelt Daisy on the floor, and, in a loud whisper through the keyhole, succeeded in drawing the attention of the distracted girl by the mere force of quietness.

"Turn your key once . . . And now once more," she advised, in a tone of calm confidence that caused faith.

Birdie obeyed. The door had been plainly double-locked, but still it would not open.

"And now, *push back the bolt*," uttered Daisy, with a sort of agonised inspiration, her first plan having failed.

It shot back—the door opened.

No one had ever thought of the bolt before; Birdie in her passion had used it contrary to custom, and then forgotten it. Now she was safe, so far at least, among them all, almost rejoicing.

"Ladies, ladies," cried the men's voices below. "Dress yourselves and get out of the house. Look sharp—there is no time to lose. Hurry!"

Doing as they were bidden, all dispersed to pull on hastily what additional garments they could seize—before escaping with what they could save besides from the burning house.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Be bold, be bold, and everywhere be bold,
Be not too bold.

Gascoigne and Jack Dimity were going home together after their own ball. The night was warm and fine. They resolved that walking back to barracks would be pleasantest; they both wished to smoke, and felt more than usually friendly towards each other, although rather unusually silent at intervals. Their way led them down the Khyber Pass Road, although there was a shorter cut past some mews and through back streets. By himself, Jack would probably have taken this; but his elder friend questioningly observed, "It is not very pleasant, eh?" which was Gascoigne's way of proposing his likings, and Jack unquestioningly agreed. Jack always did agree with Gascoigne cheerfully; which was the greatest proof of friendship this young British Army Grumbler could give. As they neared the road, a fire-engine passed a little ahead of them.

"Why, where is the fire?" they asked each other, in curiosity, and quickened their steps. Turning the corner, and looking towards the well-known villas, one exclamation burst from both.

"It can't be!" just uttered Jack, flinging away his cigar and beginning to run.

"I'm afraid it is," answered Gascoigne, who had started off even quicker than Dimity. They could only see the smoke and a yellow glow beneath it, at first; but even whilst they ran an occasional great burst of flame would shoot up, showing how the mischief was spreading.

Full-dress uniforms and military great-coats are not the easiest attire for a foot-race; still both were in such alarmed earnest that they went at a tremendous pace, and were near the villa in a wonderfully few seconds, seeing already the groups of staring or helping spectators, black against the lurid light.

"Were all saved? Are any still in danger?" was the question in the minds of both. As they burst through the outskirts of the little crowd, they breathlessly called out to ask this to left and right. Some of the bystanders answered one thing, some another; they did not know for certain; the police knew; the firemen knew. A lady had been locked into her room and all but roasted alive, one of the servants had said.

"Was she saved——?" No one rightly knew.

At that moment a great jet of flame, from one of the front windows nearest that side where the fire burnt fiercest, lit up the whole house; and close inside the little window of Daisy's room could be seen a motionless figure, clad in the white ball-dress both men recognised. With a loud cry Jack sprang forward, but was prevented by some of the constables with, "Keep back—keep back, sir; it's dangerous." He would have broken his way past them, however, but for two loving arms flung round his neck, which stopped him more effectually than would twenty policemen.

But no such sweet gaoler arrested poor Gascoigne.

Without a word of outcry, he too had seen that white form up there amongst smoke and flame; seen—and in another second his solitary figure had sprung through the space kept clear before the burning house, and was beheld climbing a ladder that remained planted against the walls. Cries from below, exclamations, warning to go no

farther, entreaties, even the roar of Jack's great, bellowing shouts, all failed to reach that climber's ears; or sounded only like an idle hum from the crowd beneath in his terribly intense excitement. He was at the top of the ladder before any of the many who had rushed forward could have stopped him. Then a volume of smoke burst out; and those below saw him stagger and cling to the window-ledge. Gascoigne was, indeed, almost choked by its "hot, black breath." Next moment, though, he had smashed the glass of the little window with its one long pane, had reached in though still on the ladder, and dragged out the figure that stood, indeed, close to him; but even as he brought his prize to open air and closer view, a second burst of smoke, this time mingled with flame, swept into his face. A great cry burst from the throats of all the little crowd below. Some of the firemen who had already gone into the circle of danger to succour the gallant gentleman, if possible, now rushed to the foot of the ladder—but were useless. A little way he slipped down the ladder, as if half-choked and unconscious, but still grasping the precious burden he had perilled his life to save. A little way!—then his grasp relaxed, and he tottered, swayed, and fell heavily downwards amongst the pitying arms stretched out to break his fall. They dragged him back to safety, dashed cold water in his face, then when he faintly opened his eyes poor Gascoigne saw, with feeble bewilderment, Daisy—Daisy, whom he had tried to save, sobbing over him, but dressed in a *dark* gown and hat! Meanwhile, prone beside him on the ground, lay a stiff headless thing, wearing the white ball-dress of his little lady-love. It was the stuffed figure; the ludicrous Aunt Sally, or Galatea, of Jack's creation, at which they had so laughed! Over both the dummy and his prostrate friend Jack now stood, in a state of mind divided between wild wishes to indulge both in sobbing and laughter; a "high-striking, jolly queer sort of go," to himself altogether unparalleled, indescribable.

"Do you understand, dear old fellow? She is safe—she was safe all the time," he tried to explain, bending down.

But Gascoigne's white face was only upturned towards Daisy: he only heard her pitying murmurs; saw her eyes full of a grieving tenderness his mind could not then fathom—soon his own closed again. He knew no more.

Then that night he was carried gently in to Lilac Lodge,

and laid on the best bed in the Misses Silverthorne's house, where those good old ladies flitted about, softly mourning over their poor, brave Gerald. Yet none were more active in bestirring themselves to do all that could be done for him; and in assisting with all their hearts the houseless neighbours, whom they had not "called upon" for so long a time.

CHAPTER XLIV.

I'll taste the luxury of woe.

Everybody said to each other, "Hot weather!" and the bluebottle-flies buzzed in swarms.

Outside the little garden at Lilac Lodge all was a crimson and yellow hot blaze, what with intense sunlight, scarlet anemones, gaudy tulips, and flaming red-hot-poker plants, all among the parched lilac-bushes, whose glories were dead since spring.

But only a very small view was given of this outside glow and glare; for there were blinds almost drawn down within the French window, and blinds stretched far beyond them outside, so that a mere peep was left to show that there was purgatory, and here was paradise.

And indoors, clear white muslin curtains softly waved in a mysteriously-created draught, and white muslin again in a sort of fluted wainscoting bordered the room, with blue ribbon peeping through it, (the old ladies declared this was only to hide the damaged state of the paint, which was too expensive to repair just now, and really did well enough in winter—but it was so pretty no one quite believed them). And besides, the couches and easy-chairs were draped with bibs and tuckers of snowy muslin and lace, and tied up with pale-blue bows; they reminded one of so many of Sir Joshua Reynolds' "Muslin Misses."

Next door, the half-burnt house stared across the bushes at its trim neighbour, like a blackened skull, with its eyeless windows and gaping doorway.

It was two days since the fire, but Daisy Dimity felt still in bewilderment; her soft, simple soul all stirred. She was uncertain whether to looked shamefaced or proud, to show her gratitude to Gascoigne, or to be silent.

All the town had been startled by the news of the fire; excited in mess-rooms and drawing-rooms by Gascoigne's share therein.

First, as it was rumoured that he was in danger, all the world hastened to knock and ring and inquire at Lilac Lodge till the trim maids there were "wore off their feet." Next, when it was found he was doing fairly well, and likely enough to recover soon, there went up a great roar of laughter at the mistake he had made, when meaning to save little Miss Dimity! People talked of applying to the Humane Society for a medal for him; of getting up a mock address.

Daisy heard some of these remarks from the coming and going neighbours, and raged and writhed as much as her gentle soul was capable.

Was not the man's gallantry the same? she asked herself—although the town young ladies called the story "too funny!" and the men laughed at it as the last great joke.

Was he not ill now; if not in danger, enough so to make her miserable? Yes! she would have been miserable for his dear sake, if even she had not been the cause.

Then the few callers she could bring herself to meet looked at her strangely, made laughing innuendoes about her second self at the fire, and Captain Gascoigne's devotion. She seemed in a false position; did not know how to look; so fled to her room and wept till she looked a ghost.

"The ghost of a white mouse!" said Fuzzy, who found her way upstairs, and would fain have stayed awhile, but that, having been hospitably taken in by the Smeeths, as was also Birdie, she dared not keep these inquisitive friends waiting long below on the gravel.

"Don't come downstairs, dear! You've got a headache, yes!—of course," said the good Misses Silverthorne, with delicate, if sometimes bustling, sympathy. "Put up your feet on the sofa, dear child; there is nothing like that. And let us send you some tea, dear; just a nice *leetle* cup."

So morning, noon, afternoon, eve, and night Daisy was offered tea and the sofa; the sofa and tea; whilst she felt a bewildered little goose, and did not know whether to cry or rejoice, be happy or wretched.

She only saw Jack for a few moments; he was so busy with Gascoigne, and also that, having just been made Instructor of Musketry, he had to take out his men to shoot at the rifle-range outside the town from early morn to afternoon.

He, too, looked at her strangely.

"You had better go home, little one," he bluntly said.

"The old ladies here have their hands full, and the house is crowded," certainly two more did overcrowd that Lilliput lodge, "and—and it would be best every way. Take Fuzzy Cox back with you, as she's houseless; and you'd like to have her. I'll wire to the governor if you like."

So that was settled, of course, as Jack wished it, though his little sister's heart was heavy; and to-morrow she and Fuzzy were going back to Elm Hall.

Back—home! And she had not been able to see Gascoigne. He was still so ill, bruised, one arm broken; his face scorched. Going away for ever to-morrow! and this was such a sultry afternoon. No wonder her head ached and her heart was like a piece of lead.

Jack and Mr. Lee were paying a visit, having come towards afternoon tea-time. Jack was dull, having been up since dewy five that morning, and hearing all day only the inexpressive bang-bang of the "Strappers" firing at the targets. But Lee was as gay as a lark, after playing cricket all day under a broiling sun; besides having insisted on sitting up all the past two nights with Gascoigne. He was indeed always eager and proud to be sick-nurse to his friends; being so kind-hearted that it was a real pleasure to him to think he was sacrificing himself for them, besides being much flattered by the praise that his woman-like gentleness, deftness, and high spirits, toned down to proper sick-room cheerfulness, always gained.

"Burning the candle at both ends, as usual, you see," he exclaimed, assuming a sort of half-reckless, half-tragic air, in answer to Miss Prudence's gentle expostulations on his not having lain down to sleep that afternoon. "I can't help it; it is my nature! But, you see, we were playing the Marstown High School to-day, so some of the fellows thought they could not get on without me. And then I had to come on here and see old Gascoigne. I love *taking it out of myself;* that's about the truth."

"Yes, it hits you off to a nicety," interposed Jack.

"Now, you old growler, be quiet. And then there is a sort of I-don't-know-what-it-is about this house that attracts one to it. Ah, Miss Prudence; ah, Miss Patience! 'How happy could I be with either!'—ho! ho! ho!"

One old lady tapped him on the one shoulder, and said he was a pretty fellow; the other tapped him on the other shoulder, and said he was a sad fellow. They both were vastly delighted with his little compliments and looked like

two primly-sweet, dried lavender stalks, trying for a moment to be coquettish.

"And then," continued the Smiler, glancing at Daisy, who in a pink and white cotton frock sat in a corner on a stool, sowing very quickly, with downcast eyes and tightly-shut little mouth—"and then how could anyone allow Marstown's fairest visitant—good, that!—to go away from us to-morrow without coming to say good-bye to her? Excuse me, won't you (to Daisy), but really, as I was saying to Gascoigne last night, 'pon my honour we shall all miss you dreadfully. It won't be like the same town. When shall I ever have another swinging dance like that last one?"

This was all said with so much momentary sincerity that Daisy's eyes quite brightened, and her mouth relaxed.

So that had been part of his nightly talk with Captain Gascoigne! She felt quite affectionate towards Lee; and indeed, ever since the fire, nothing could have been more discreetly kind than his manner towards herself. Ready to join in good fellowship with all the world, he no doubt went into fits of laughter at his friend's mistake every half-hour; alternately rushing into diffusive praise of their fellow-Strapper's gallant conduct, upholding that same, none the less, with good-naturedly jealous *esprit de corps*.

Perhaps Jack felt like Daisy somewhat—that he did not quite know how to take the matter.

So he avoided the rest of the world for a few days, and spent most of his time in Lilac Lodge, patted Daisy kindly on the shoulder, but was very silent, which made him wrongly seem grumpy.

As Lee was finishing off the first gush of his pleasing little flatteries to the fair sex, and was beginning to think of what consoling or amusing speeches he could take across the passage into the sick-room, who should drive up through the low sunlight, heated and dusty, but Una Goodchild? In she burst with her usual headlong impulsiveness that was romantic but not ungraceful, and falling on the necks of all three ladies in turn, just as they came, cried irrespectively:

"Oh, my dear—what an event! What you must have gone through in mind!"

"Indeed we did!" all three answered, each for herself; one Miss Silverthorne thinking of the responsibilities of changing bandages, the other of anxieties in cooking for sick gentlemen.

"But what a noble, gallant thing it was to be saved so,

wasn't it?" went on Una, her gray eyes kindling with enthusiasm, though it was doubtful whether the thing meant was Daisy, the dummy, or had confused reference to Gascoigne. She looked at Daisy, as she added under her breath, "How happy you must be to have inspired such a noble deed! During those moments you must have felt like living."

"Indeed I felt much more like dying; and I never was more miserable!" There was plenty of truth but no atom of heroic stuff in Daisy's voice, as she replied.

Though question and answer were meant to be private between the girls, both the young men overheard them. The Smiler instantly ducked behind an ottoman, and holding up a cushion, in which he buried his sleek little head, gave way to violent pantomimic gestures of mirth at their romanticism, drawing up his knees to his chin and quivering all over. But he was behind the girls.

Poor Jack, on the contrary, who was facing them, only grinned in a suppressed way, and was instantly withered by their looks; especially so by Una Goodchild, which was very hard, considering he had rather admired her. When the young ladies turned round, Lee's fit of convulsion was over; and with the air of a very good boy he was patting the sofa cushion straight. After this they both addressed him with unusual graciousness, to mark slight displeasure with Jack. Such is often the luck of the unworthy.

At this moment a loud ringing was suddenly heard at the bell.

CHAPTER XLV.

Tante buone che non val niente.

Who could it be, ringing at the Lilac Lodge bell in this way? The Smiler flew to reconnoitre from behind a blind in the front drawing-room; then raised his eyebrows and hands, and almost his hair in surprise.

"Miss Black, by all that's lovely!" he murmured faintly.

Miss Black! The old ladies drew themselves up and looked at each other; a displeased thrill tingling through them.

"To ring the bell!" ejaculated one.

"When we had written up expressly not to do so!" added the other.

"And so violently!" ended the first.

The smiling maid, who had gone to the door, now came to her mistresses without a smile for the moment; and in a very prim voice whispered, that the young lady outside wished to know if she might be allowed to nurse Captain Gascoigne.

The little old ladies bounced up as if touched by an electric shock; a sort of shiver seized them; then their very caps seemed to quiver and bristle. "We will speak to the—the young lady ourselves," they replied, with intense propriety; signing to the middle-aged maid to retire to the kitchen recesses, for they fondly believed her to be still a mere child in years, as she had been when first she came to them. Then both moved in a most dignified manner to the door, but there turned, almost appealingly. "Surely she is not, this Miss Black—she could not be—a great friend of our dear Gerald's?"

"Not that I ever heard of. I hardly thought he knew her," answered the Smiler, smiling no more, in a rather quavering voice; being thoroughly taken aback, and meditating that since Miss Black knew himself much better, what might not be his fate were he to fall ill.

"He just knew her as little as he possibly could. All the friendship was very much on her side," said Jack bluntly, though he had hesitated still more in taking upon himself to speak so far plainly. Both, being men, of course tried to conceal their surprise; whilst Una and Daisy sat in speechless indignation, as utter country maidens.

"We understand."

The Silverthorne sisters rustled out closely side by side, mutually supporting each other in silver-gray severities of appearance; their tulle caps, snowy curls, black lace, lavender gowns, all seemingly transformed in sternness.

They closed the door carefully behind them; the excited listeners could hear nothing, but in three minutes they saw a smart girl's figure, tighter-waisted, higher-heeled, and with a brighter complexion than ever, marching hastily from the door. ("Quicker than she came!" thought Daisy, clasping her hands in secret vengefulness, for once in her life, over her rival's discomfiture.) There was such an air of mysterious reticence about both old ladies when they returned, however, that no one ventured to ask how they had routed the invader.

"A little mistake," was all Miss Prudence observed, primly crossing her mittened hands.

"The young lady felt needless anxiety on the score of how Captain Gascoigne would be taken care of, as she did not know us. That was all. . . . . And I do not think she will think it necessary to come back again," added Miss Patience, with an anciently innocent air, that made Jack grin again, unlucky fellow! whilst Lee, hiding himself behind Una, Daisy, and a feather-fan, writhed like a gay eel in private ecstasy.

Of course tea was now brought in. Such teas as those two old ladies gave! It had a finer flavour, and was sipped out of more delicate china than that of anyone else. In winter their guests had such profusion of hot cakes, that other roused housekeepers begged the receipt of them; yet their cooks never could quite succeed in the baking; in summer the cream and fruit had quite a country charm, the latter chosen in the market whilst the rest of Marstown was still dawdling over breakfast.

And then Una explained the cause of her visit: which was to beg Daisy to come and stay with her at Fairlawns.

"My father has got an attack of gout, so he and my mother are going to Buxton. Now, as I hate fashionable watering-places, I thought we two could have such a nice, long summer quietly together. None of my six brothers will be likely to come home; but, thank goodness, you are like me, not a girl who ever cares much for gentlemen's society," she ended with eagerness.

At this last, Jack looked glum; Lee comical; Daisy innocently a little dubious.

Una was grievously disappointed when she understood the impossibility of her plan.

"I never cared to have a girl friend before; my six brothers were always sufficient for me. And I did think we should get on so well with our studies."

Daisy at this felt a mysterious dig at her waist, startlingly fraternal; just as of her own accord she exclaimed: "Oh! how well you and Polly would agree together! Indeed, you must come to Elm Hall instead. That will be the very thing."

It proved, after some hesitation about acceptance, to be indeed the very thing to please Una and everybody. After which poor Daisy felt an equally mysterious delighted tattoo on her back, which only sisterly affection enabled her to bear without wincing.

The talk now turned upon the Coxes.

Lee had seen the little doctor hopping amongst the ruins of his house, calculating in delight how much he gained by its late insurance.

Fuzzy and Birdie were reported as having been received with open arms by the good-natured Smeeths, in spite of previous slight differences.

"I always knew there was good in those girls," said Jack heartily.

"Yes," said both Daisy and Smiler together.

"What, the Misses Smeeth; I have seen them. I did not know they were ladies," quietly remarked Una.

"Neither did we," primly added the old Misses Silverthorne.

Jack looked out of the window, thinking what prejudices even the most excellent people may have.

Daisy quite cleverly turned the talk by pitying Mrs. Cox. Poor thing! She had disliked the roving life she had led when her little doctor had been in the army, and had just been so happy in her new house——

"By Jingo! Talk of an angel—here she comes with all her daughters. This is to say good-bye to you, Daisy."

It proved so, indeed. But Birdie seemed to have come with ungraciousness, since she began to say: "Well, here I am! I was just dying to be at the evening band with the Smeeths; but Fuzzy dragged me here to see the last of you, so I hope you are satisfied."

"I am so sorry——" began Daisy, distressed.

"Not at all," quickly put in Fuzzy, with an indignant glance at her younger sister. "It is only Birdie's fun. And even the Smeeth girls send you their warmest love; and were wanting to come with us to see you themselves, but that I told them you had a headache."

"And because they copied your best white dress exactly in cheap baptiste, and furniture lace at threepence a yard, and thought you'd be offended, for theirs look just as nice," put in Birdie, with malice.

"Do be quiet; when the people have been so kind to you!" murmured Fuzzy, almost angrily, adding aloud to Daisy: "they did not mean to wear them till you were gone, dear; but they had nothing else fresh. They told me to say they hoped you would not mind."

"Not at all," cried Daisy heartily.

"Well, shall we go the band now?" asked Birdie, jumping up; so her sister was obliged to take her off.

Mrs. Cox now affectionately seated herself beside her late little guest; and although her elegant professions of regret at the latter's departure were perhaps somewhat affected, yet, as she thanked Daisy for having worked so indefatigably at the fire, her eyes were really wet with some mild tears—poor soul!

"Oh, my dear," she whispered, taking Daisy's hand as they sat apart and giving it a little squeeze. "It is all very well for the doctor to make jokes about the insurance-money, but what does he care? He says he and Birdie will go off to Scarborough for a month, and have a lark together till the new house we think of taking in Singlebrick Terrace is built. But he never thinks of all the work I shall have furnishing again, and the servants, and—everything. Not, indeed, that I want him to stay, or Birdie either; we can get on quite well without them, of course (another little squeeze hinted most privately, *You* understand!). And, my dear, did you know my Indian shawl was burnt; the one you have seen me wear sometimes? That will never be replaced to me."

Poor, poor Mrs. Cox! Seen her wear that Indian shawl! Yes, verily; scores of times! Was it not her one silver-papered, tin-boxed treasure of a shawl; her flag of gentility, wedding-shawl, christening-shawl, impress-the-Marstown-natives shawl on all occasions?

Daisy's heart was sore for her; she did so wish it was in her power to replace that shawl. Jack had brought one home, certainly, but that was for his stepmother. But, if ever it were in her power, she now made a small vow to give Mrs. Cox another and finer Indian shawl. And indeed, to peep into futurity, she was curiously able soon after to do so—one like that brought home by Jack.

"Still, don't let Fuzzy hurry back from you to help me, dear," confidentially whispered the mother. "Now, don't—for it will do her good to have a little change from here, and Pussy is very satisfied to stay."

As she spoke, Pussy was being teased, to her evident satisfaction, by Lee on the subject of the neighbour in whose house Mrs. Cox, Pussy, and some others of the family had received shelter on the night of the fire. The neighbour was middle-aged, a bachelor, and a new-comer to Khyber Pass Road, whose older inhabitants had freely criticised him.

"Going to stay on for a fortnight or three weeks! Lovely! And you think Mr. McNought is a very nice man; though last week you abused him as a disgustingly rich, retired carpet-maker, with a wig and false teeth. Oh, Miss Pussy, Miss Pussy!"

"He is very kind—and such a modest man," softly answered the fair one, casting down her eyelids.

A burst of laughter greeted this announcement.

"Pussy means about himself, his having got on so well in life, and made so much money," observed Mrs. Cox, growing rather red, and coming to the rescue, "and so humble-minded towards us about his own family, too."

"Ah, yes! He *has* no family, of course—quite a self-made man, we hear. Very proper; shows a nice feeling on his part," simpered both the old ladies in symphony.

"Yes, indeed. And he is so pressing for us to stay on until we can get quite settled," continued the poor lady, rising rather nervously, and making a movement as *if* she were drawing the Indian shawl round her shoulders—whereas she had now no shawl at all. "He is all that is hospitable and good, though such a very unassuming man." With which, she took a final farewell of Daisy.

CHAPTER XLVI.

The little daisy that at evening closes.

Evening had come. Outside in the garden-plot of Lilac Lodge, Jack and Una, with a great air of being a practical couple and above all nonsense of flirtation, were busying themselves in watering the drooping flowers by way of being useful to the Misses Silverthorne. The old ladies looking out, gently ignoring this object, only observed to each other, "They make a pretty couple."

Why should the charms of twilight in the country alone be so often praised in ballads or novels? In a lesser degree, of course, but still in some degree, its gentle influence steals also over a town preparing to sleep. Its power of *abstraction*, first perhaps among all men, or at least poets, brought to notice by old Wordsworth, that

> Priest to us all
> Of the wonder and bloom of the world,

—its soft veiling of all mean things or ephemeral in the world and daily life—is felt here likewise.

In Miss Silverthorne's lilac bushes out yonder, to be sure only brown sparrows are nestling down for the night, but have not these little bird town-Arabs had their nests and loves, joys and troubles, to a degree that might interest us not much less than the songsters of the glade? There are no wild things here to come stealing out of brakes and glens, it is true; no hares or rabbits, badgers or foxes, to feed or roam unmolested; only cats to vex us, and perhaps rats, mice, and such small deer. But it is the hour for weary shop-girls, and hard-worked little maids of various kinds, to slip forth and enjoy their stolen ramble; or, it may be, only stand at the near street corner some hasty moments, enjoying the coolness, and no doubt a gossip with a neighbour little maid. They are not thinking of the Infinite; they are thinking, bless their hearts! of red-coated corporals or blue-breasted artillerymen.

Indoors, Daisy was sitting with the two old ladies in the darkened drawing-room, that looked like a shrine to Sainte Mousseline. They were all three strangely silent, and seemed stilly occupied in listening to the faint sounds—they could not hear the words—of the voices in the garden.

Young Lee had gone after tea to see Gascoigne, who had been given the two little opposite rooms on the ground-floor—one being the old ladies' private snuggery; into which last, by hard pleading that he was much better, he had been allowed to come this evening.

The drawing-room door was slightly ajar, so presently they distinctly heard the Smiler opening the opposite one, and saying, in his cheery tones: "Well, good-bye; and mind you keep your spirits up, there's nothing like it, I assure you!" with almost pathos of earnestness; then, in a burst of humour, "By-the-way, I was nearly forgetting to give you the colonel's message, when he heard your complexion was a bit scorched. 'Tell him,' said he, 'beauty's but skin deep, an' scarcely whan it's scarlet!'—ho! ho! ho! Capital proverb, isn't it?—*an' scarcely whan it's scarlet!*"

There came an answering, deeper haw haw, from within the room; plainly the invalid was capable of liking a joke.

Then the Smiler departed; having either duty or some half-a-dozen engagements obliging him, with effusive regrets, to tear himself away from Lilac Lodge.

A still deeper silence fell on the three female occupants of the drawing-room. Tick-tack! tick-tack! Daisy heard

the clock strokes for at least ten moments, whilst she was longing to say something, but had not the courage.

"Ahem!" uttered Miss Prudence at last.

What an alarming noise it was in the stillness!

"Did you speak?" inquired Daisy, with a great start.

"No, no; nothing, my dear," answered Miss Prudence with flustered apology, subsiding into her former silence.

Tick-tack! tick-tack! How terrible it seems to find oneself reduced to listening to the clock ticking—as if, *when* it would end, one might feel brave enough to say something very particular.

"Ah-hem-*em!*" then came from Miss Patience suddenly, with such additional emphasis that Daisy asked, with a still more nervous start:

"Did you want—you *were* saying something?"

"No, no—only (hem!) clearing my throat, my dear," replied Miss Patience hesitating, with quite a guilty air.

But twice the spell had been broken; the third time had come. Now or never! Daisy now, not knowing how she found her own voice, began to speak; and it sounded quite modestly courageous, though she was really trembling all over.

"I want to say, please, that I should just like to thank Captain Gascoigne before I go away."

There! it was out at last; the worst was over. Remark also, she did not say, "Shall you be shocked?" or, "Do you think it would be thought very improper?" though on these questions she had been troubling herself. With all her soft ways and modest fears, she went straight to her point, and would keep to it. The two old ladies seemed vastly fluttered, yet relieved. If Daisy's face had a sweet crimson flush, theirs were quite tinged with pink.

"It seems to us that it would be only what is proper, my dear; that really you could do *no less*," softly said the one, with much agitated emphasis.

The other added, looking very straight out of the window, and with quite a positively stern tenderness of infection:

"In fact, knowing poor dear Gerald as we do, from the time he learned to run and say his prayers (I don't mean that he did both at the same time; you know what I mean, dear), we should have felt really *hurt* if you had not proposed doing so."

The snuggery in which poor Gascoigne was sitting, by way of "a change," was one of the most unlikely little rooms

in which one might expect to see a man; above all one like him, who, whether well or ill, was essentially manly in his ways, and in general strong and active. It was, in the first place, the almshouse for all the decrepit furniture possessed by the old ladies; spider-like chairs and tables, and a great, worm-eaten, carved chest; all so scrubbed and rubbed, it was a wonder they survived, though shining as they tottered. The carpet also and curtains were marvels of patriarchal patchwork, heavily edged with cross-stitch embroidery, each square of patchwork being moth-eaten, and brushed "to the last threads."

All around were primly placed an aged host of fine-beaded, faded silk cushions, little footstools that tripped one up unawares; old shell, feather-fans, and mineral specimens adorning the mantelpiece; old black-paper silhouettes of departed friends hung in black frames on the walls; and—do not laugh—in a small bookcase, all the old, very old children's books that had once amused the two little, short-waisted misses who were now the old Misses Silverthorne; perhaps the most amusing amongst them being Mrs. Trimmer's "Robins."

In one corner lay, partly out of sight, two guitar-cases.

It was only in this room—safe from all intrusion—only here, that alone, or at most when together, the old ladies would venture to take out again these instruments of youth, with their blue ribands, and thrum them, and hum to them with secret pleasure, although regrets for the past voices of their youth. Alack-a-day! We would so gladly remain young for all our lives long.

Moreover, this room was also used by the sisters for such delicate culinary or distilling mysteries as they trusted to no one but themselves, and for which the kitchen was unsuitable. Lately they had been making here a *pot-pourri* of roses, of which the whole room was redolent.

Into this snuggery and Gascoigne's presence, Daisy was now ceremoniously introduced, as it were, by Miss Prudence. Her would-be deliverer rose with some little difficulty of stiffness, out of a deep arm-chair to meet her, upon which Daisy at once cried out:

"Oh, please don't get up!"

To this Gascoigne, who would have tried to rise as a matter of course, if even he had been much more ill, in any lady's presence, only replied by saying, with a nervous laugh:

"Will you excuse my offering you my left hand; as my right arm is not quite well yet."

Well! It had been broken, and was now strapped up and swathed. With this romantic outburst, and looking remarkably shy of each other these two young people met.

Miss Silverthorne seemed almost as flustered as themselves; far less events being sufficient to disturb the tranquil pool of her own and her sister's existence.

"I must go away for a few minutes, my dear Gerald, to see about some gru—beef-tea, I mean—for you to take the last thing at night; a little eating induces sleep so wonderfully. And, also, the doctor considered it bad for you to talk to two or three persons at a time, so we must be very, very careful to do as he bids us, you know. But I shall be back again very soon; and—and, Daisy, my dearest, you might show Captain Gascoigne any of those books on the table meanwhile, if you think they would amuse him."

Modest, good-hearted old spinster! Having thus, as she believed, thrown a veil of perfect propriety over her real object in leaving these two together, she retired.

The books she had pointed to, with the object of giving the young people some pretext of occupation, had been withdrawn from the sitting-room as too unfashionable, but also too beloved to be exposed to the possible criticisms of visitors; old annuals bound in red watered silk, dimmed with years; collections of photographs, taken when the art was in its awkward infancy, now yellow or mildewed.

Daisy, who had looked after her chaperon's retreating figure with secret trembling, now glanced, with almost equal dismay at a crabbed copy of Thomson's "Seasons" that lay nearest her hand; then gazed on the ground and wished herself a hundred leagues away, after all the longing she had felt to see Gascoigne face to face, and be able to thank him her very self. Her heart was fluttering like a little frightened bird; she could not raise her eyes; she dared not speak!

But Gascoigne, who had recovered himself by virtue of his manhood and added years, first broke the silence by saying, in what sounded a grimly jesting tone:

"I am a rather unsightly object, I am afraid, Miss Dimity, for any lady who is good enough to visit me. What a hearty laugh you must all have had at my stupidity!"

"Oh, no—no! no—no!" uttered poor Daisy, with quick crimson blushes; all the modest romance in her heart so

dashed by his apparent raillery she *could* not say what she had felt—at least, not just yet. So she sat on blushing, whilst Gascoigne, with some nervousness, too—and kindly wishing to let her recover herself, and terribly afraid of being thanked—with his left hand hastily fluttered the leaves of an old brown album.

"What is this? Should you like to look over it?" in his own perturbation of mind holding it himself so that she could not possibly see it. "Ah! this reminds me of an old verse—do you know it?—

> She kept an album, too, at home,
> Well filled with all an album's glories—
> Paintings of butterflies, and Rome—
> Patterns for trimmings—Persian stories—
> Soft songs to Julia's cockatoo—
> Fierce odes to Famine and to Slaughter—
> And autographs of Prince le Boo—
> And recipes for elder-water.

"What a wonderful memory you have!" murmured Daisy admiringly, in a meek, small voice. "No, I don't know it; I know very little. I—I am going home to-morrow, Captain Gascoigne."

"Going home," echoed Gascoigne cheerfully. "Well, I congratulate you. You must be very glad to leave a hot, dusty town, and be going back to green fields. Are you not?"

"N–o."

"What! Not to see your own family again; when you told me you were hardly happy away from them, and when there will be so much new to tell them? You must like that."

"No—not exactly. I mean, I should, of course, any other time; but now——" upon which, Daisy seemed to find herself and her sentence and her momentary bravery all dissolving into tears. Through this blinding state of affairs she contrived, nevertheless, to add, in broken words: "I mean, nobody *could* like to go away whilst you are ill; when—especially—because! . . . Oh, please, Captain Gascoigne, I want to thank you so very much! But I could not do it sooner." Whereupon both Daisy's plump little hands went up to hide her face; and all efforts at trying to look as if there was nothing the matter failed, so that she sobbed unrestrainedly.

In the midst of this total overflooding of emotion, when her usual barriers of self-control were all carried away, she

knew nothing for certain—but had a vague idea that Gascoigne too had put aside his air of kindly unconcern; then, as she sobbed still, that his composure more and more utterly vanished—till at last it quite broke down. She heard, in accents of deepest distress and most tender commiseration, "Poor little thing——! Don't! don't cry so terribly. Was it on my account; tell me . . . tell me . . . *Yes?*" This last word, though not uttered much above a whisper, was still an ecstatic and louder echo of a most faintly, small admission that only just succeeded in escaping Daisy's lips. It gave Gascoigne the most honest and hearty delight he had perhaps ever felt in his life; likewise an overwhelming desire to console his little sweetheart for her grief that he should have suffered at all on her behalf, while he had freely ventured his life for her.

He forgot his illness; Daisy forgot all things on earth but him, and what he then began to say. Miss Prudence, apparently immersed in the merits or demerits of the beef-tea, seemed to forget them both!

When they returned to common sense, and a more ordinary state of feeling, it seemed to them as if a small revolution had taken place in the world. They had been in Arcadia during the short period not fully described—whilst Jack and Miss Goodchild were still quietly watering the flowers outside—and while Miss Prudence was yet in the kitchen.

"Do you know that Mr. Dimity, your father, has written inviting me to Elm Hall, as soon as ever I am well enough to go?" said Gascoigne then, which was his first sentence of returning commonplace; but he looked more happy over it than commonplace feeling required.

"What!—has he really? How delightful! But—but are you coming, Captain Gascoigne? For you might think it dull with us in the country, after Marstown."

Gascoigne burst out laughing so cheerfully that Miss Daisy's modest fears on the all-important point of this great lord of creation's amusement were dispelled for evermore.

"If you knew how I hate garrison towns you would not say that. One's only daily object seems to be taking long rides or walks to get out of them. In fact, Miss Dimity, I am so tired of my round of present existence, that I purpose retiring very soon from the army, and settling down under my ancestral roof-tree; in preparation for which, I think a

visit to Elm Hall might accustom me gradually to such a great change of life. What do you say to my plan?"

Miss Dimity, however, would not say what she thought of his plan.

"I have not answered the squire yet," went on Gerald, with an irrepressible smile, which, although he tried to assume gravity, would break out in a will-o'-the-wisp fashion, lighting up his eyes, and indeed all features of his face alternately. "I waited to accept, till I could ask whether *you* would make me welcome."

To this Miss Dimity did vouchsafe a reply; which, though partly inaudible, seemed thoroughly contenting to her questioner.

"There is one person, however, who will feel very badly treated, I fear, by this arrangement of ours," continued Gascoigne, with a deep mock sigh.

"Who? Not Jack; he won't growl at all—at least very little—I am sure! Unless, of course, at your leaving his regiment—he is such a friend of yours."

"No, not Jack. He may be brought to forgive me."

"It is Polly, of course. Ah! but you don't know my sister Polly, or you would not think that. Poor Polly!—she *is* so unselfish."

"No, I don't mean Polly."

"You mean my father, then; but he is so kind."

"Oh, no; I don't."

"Mrs. Dimity, perhaps; still she could *hardly* much mind."

"No."

Daisy's thoughts, as a last resource, flew to the tribe; with simple wonder how her lover could have heard of them, unless from Jack.

"Then it is my next brother, Billy."

"No."

"Or Bobby."

"No."

"Jemmy then, because I teach him his lesson.

"No."

"Well, Charlie—" in desperation.

"No."

"Then there is only the baby left, and he minds about nobody," cried Daisy, fairly giving up.

"No," said Gerald, finally, with a broad, peculiar smile. "*But what will Jerry Brown say?*"

"Jerry Brown! I never told you his name the other night. I know I did not! How did you know it?—do tell me; please do tell me!"

But Gascoigne was laughing with such inward chuckling and immense enjoyment that he really could not tell her—just yet.

"You must have met him when you were staying with your uncle, at Barley Vicarage," responded Daisy, with an air of having guessed the puzzle most wisely, yet being puzzled.

"Exactly so—" agreed Gascoigne, adding hastily, "when I go to Elm Hall, I will tell you more about him, perhaps—but not now."

For Miss Prudence was returning, beating some mixture most delicately with a tinkling sound, as of a silver spoon against the best china cup in their pantry; which mixture was a temptingly rare, secret decoction meant to rouse the jaded appetite of the poor invalid—who since his illness had only been offered about double as many meals as those he usually partook of.

CHAPTER XLVII.

I remember, I remember
The house where I was born;
The little window where the sun
Came peeping in at morn.

And now Daisy was fairly on her homeward journey, speeding back in the train towards Elm Hall. But not alone, as she had gone to Marstown; for Fuzzy Cox sat opposite her, with a brighter face than she had worn since several days; and also—a gentleman.

At the station Daisy had heard herself accosted by a mild voice, and, turning, saw the Reverend Adolphus Younghusband, who was likewise going home to his vicarage beside Elm Hall. He was full of mild surprise that Daisy and Miss Cox should be returning on the very same day actually as himself; and seemed to think it quite a small dispensation of Providence, for which all three ought to be grateful.

"It is such a risk for two young ladies to travel alone, without a—a gentleman to look after them, you know," he added; making a gentle rush for a train that was just starting for the opposite end of England to that they were bound

for—and being repelled, to his bewilderment, by a stern porter.

Daisy felt quite sure that they two girls would have had a much safer journey under the guard's silver-tipped care, and even a more enjoyable one. But she did not like to be unkind. Also, Fuzzy expressed herself so delightedly of a contrary opinion, and talked with such town-bred fluency of speech and vivacity of topic, that the country celibate seemed quite bewitched by the spell of her eloquence.

So Daisy soon left them to themselves; and retiring to the opposite end of the carriage she watched the flying landscape, and smiled at happy, inward thoughts in a way that seemed quite silently sociable to the others—who, whenever they looked round, perceived she was in such a blissful day-dream that, out of pure kindness, they would not disturb her.

It was late evening when they arrived at their small roadside station. There, waiting outside for them, was not the heavy close carriage with its fat horses; but, to Daisy's immense joy, young Polly sitting jauntily in the squire's stanhope behind his fast cob, which it was the greatest of favours on his part to lend to wife, son, or daughter.

"There you are, dear! I am so glad to see you back; but I can't come down to kiss you, because of this horse," called out Polly with lofty affection from her proud position, as if she dared not let go the reins of that fiery steed an instant, even though the groom stood at his nose; but quite sure Daisy would perfectly understand the situation. "Please ask Miss Cox to excuse me," with quite a grown-up air. "And I have brought the light cart in for your luggage."

Daisy looked up at her sister with almost speechless admiration. To have managed to acquire the use of the stanhope, and the light cart, and a new woman-of-the-world air—none of which she had ever had before her elder's short absence—was truly marvellous.

"How well you are looking, Polly darling!" she answered, standing on tiptoe, since as yet she could do no more, to gaze up with a very bright face. "It was such a clever plan of yours to drive in for us like this."

At this moment her late clerical protector came meekly out of the station-master's office—having discovered that his largest black portmanteau had gone to York. He carried a small black valise in his hand, which was all the luggage remaining to him; and, looking at the dusty road with still

greater meekness, prepared to foot it on a pilgrimage homewards.

Fuzzy Cox, meanwhile, flickered, as it were, with bright consolation and deepest sympathy around him. The fair young celibate smiled resignedly at her, as they stood apart in the evening sunlight. In his hour of trial, cheered by such an angel met unawares, he could not show himself utterly ungrateful. They were quite forgetful for a moment of the sisters, who gazed at them in surprise.

Daisy explained matters to Polly so far as she knew; although she did not know that Fuzzy had just used her much larger experience of active life than the curate's to stir up the stolidity of the stationmaster; besides putting the confused Adolphus gently right on the subject of where he had last seen his lost goods, which she knew much better than himself.

"We'll ask him to drive back with us—the very thing!" declared Polly with amused promptitude; and whilst Daisy was still sweetly deliberating, she had called out:

"Mr. Younghusband! Mr. Younghusband! you must not think of walking. There is a seat behind here; please take it."

"*How* nice!" just murmured Fuzzy with glad grace. It seemed to the curate that, but for the slight emphasis she laid on her sentence, it would have floated light as thistle-down past his dull ears. He hesitated still; looked twice at the road; then at her—and hesitated no more.

"You sisters will have so much to say to each other at first—oh, I know!—that you must not trouble yourselves to treat me 'as company.' No, indeed. I will not interfere for worlds. Let me sit behind, or anywhere," cried Fuzzy, now coming up with merry triumph, though some surprise in her eyes.

"Well, if you *don't* mind; thank you very much," replied Polly, replying with a quickness of tact that only natural aptitude, not her limited experience, could have taught her.

"You would like to drive back, Daisy, of course?" went on the young sister, magnanimously offering to give up the reins.

"No, no; I would rather just sit beside you this time, dear," answered Daisy, who dearly loved driving—and, above all, driving the cob; but who had a fine perception of Polly's moods, with loving regard for them. She herself came back

as one who had been in the giddy whirl of Marstown—that gay garrison town, full of fair women and brave men, as she knew it seemed to the simple dwellers in green fields afar. She knew, from having so thought herself in her days of previous purely country life; and should she now take the small but still prized pleasure of driving the cob home from Polly?

"Well; perhaps it is just as well, as I have got my hand *in* with him; and you must be a little out of practice," answered the younger sister with secret satisfaction, but a still somewhat lofty air.

For the cob was not to be had every day, as Daisy would soon find again; although it was just possible that, having emerged from her chrysalis state into that of a ball-butterfly, she might have come home with new-fangled ideas, and a head slightly turned by the attentions of wasp-waisted, red-coated officers.

Young Polly was as good a girl of her age as could be; but she was still a school-room chrysalis, and severe! Shade of Rhadamanthus! how severe such young persons are! So, although she loved Daisy with her whole heart, still, moved perhaps by some unguessed envy, the poor grub felt inclined to suspect her sister of fine *débutante* airs and contempt of the former simple delights they two had always shared.

"Oh, Polly dear!" now said Daisy, with a restful smile and a gaze round of utter satisfaction. "It does seem so nice to be home again."

Polly looked round somewhat amazed, then became slowly mollified.

They turned down among lanes, dusty no doubt below, but oh! so shady and in-arched with elm-trees overhead, so high-banked and pleasantly tangled with red woodbine and milky bindweed trails; while through each gate they could see green seas of wheat or corn-fields, all over the gentle dimpling level of a midland plain, dotted with broad-topped trees and varied with deep-hearted hedgerows, and, in some corners of neglected earth, already a blush of scarlet poppies that would soon become a blaze.

"There is the church spire!" cried Daisy again, in simple ecstasy.

Home! home! that was indeed what she had craved for when so miserable lately; to hear Polly's voice, to see

all her loved ones, the well-known fields, the rookery, the dear old house, with all its old associations (although, indeed, neither she nor it was aged, comparatively speaking). But Polly, now becoming perfectly soft to her heart's core, began to take an opposite view of the case, almost pityingly superior.

"Come—were you not happy away, at the end of your visit, dear? Was the gaiety Dead Sea fruit? That I can quite well understand—from reading about it, you know." Polly's mind had been thus enlightened by a judicious selection of school-room light literature, in which all the good heroines got wealthily married, after tasting of the world's frivolities and much misliking them.

Daisy looked in turn rather shamed.

"It is not that. I was most wretched at one time—but at the end I was very happy; although I can't help being glad to come home and tell you and the rest all about it. For oh, Polly, what do you think——?" Then she lowered her voice, so did Polly her head; and soon how those two did talk—in a whispered, eager rushing together of their minds.

There was no need to be afraid of being overheard, either; for those behind were too earnestly occupied in unfolding and learning the mysteries of ecclesiastical, ritualistic vestments; alb and cope and chasuble.

"How beautiful it must be to work them!" exclaimed Fuzzy; then with a little sigh, "I—I have had a good deal of practice in embroidery." (Yes! the major's slippers.)

Meanwhile, in front, Polly was murmuring as one who had received a great shock, yet had wisely expected it in a manner: "And so he's an officer——"

"Yes, but really you would never think it!—and he's going to leave and live at his own house, you know," answered Daisy, quite apologetically. She knew that, while her own foregone ideas as to officers had been of modern Ivanhoes or grizzly heroes, her sister's were still rather of the old-fashioned moral novel kind, foolish young men of the dandy type, all lisping or swaggering. "Remember our Jack is an officer too," laughed Daisy recovering.

"Oh, Jack—yes, but Jack is different. He was always himself," replied Polly, uttering the last sentence with an air of deep wisdom; adding, however, most graciously, "but still, from your description, Captain Gascoigne must have a

great deal of common sense. And you say, besides, he is not at all good-looking."

"I said that you might not think him at all so, dear; but of course *I* think he is very," interposed Daisy.

"And that he does not care for making himself agreeable in society."

"Now, Polly, he can't help being always agreeable; what I said was, that he is always very quiet."

"So that I really think I shall like him very much indeed," ended Polly, quite unheeding Daisy's mild remonstrances. "And I believe I shall like your friend Miss Goodchild, too. Yes, better than"—a slight backward jerk of her head designated Miss Cox. "We two should not get on so well together."

"Ah, well; poor Fuzzy!—perhaps not. But, anyhow, *they* two seem to get on remarkably well together," answered Daisy, with comfortable kindliness. "And I know you and Una will be fast friends."

And now the cob, trotting faster, passed the little hamlet near home, consisting of the post-office, The Black Bull public-house, and four rural cottages. The lodge-gates came in sight, were swung open; and they dashed through. There in the big lawn, between the house and the road, were all the beloved, well-known milch kine.

> The cattle are grazing,
> Their heads never raising;
> There are forty feeding like one!

Down the gravelled drive came all the tribe of Gad whooping welcome. On the steps stood the squire, beaming like a fine sunset; and Mrs. Dimity stood a little behind, as one glad indeed to see Daisy—but accustomed to put herself ostentatiously in the background of general estimation.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

> The snowy-banded, dilettante,
> Delicate-handed priest.

It was the hot resting noontide of the summer now at Elm Hall. Una Goodchild had come; the second bloom of roses was out. The birds had long ceased singing, except for occasional twitters of blissful content.

But if the first rapture of the earth's re-awakened beauty had settled into riper, fuller calm, Nature had still new charms to produce. In the black bean-fields there was a scattered flush of poppies; the cottage-gardens burnt with the red and yellow flowers of the time of year, scarlet-runners and nasturtiums.

Instead of the white butterflies that a while ago had been gaily courting in couples, beautiful moths fluttered singly by; pursued, alas! with ruthless hands and healthy clamour, by the young Dimity despoilers, four young sons of thunder, with a fifth in petticoats struggling in their rear.

It was a pleasant homestead, Elm Hall; they were a pleasant party therein.

Yet on this afternoon Daisy, standing on the white door-step, was trying not to feel so very happy that soon she must be thinking of leaving it: that this very evening the someone was coming who was to carry her off from her home and household, leaving a gap in the hearth-circle, and reducing the squire and Polly to certain tears.

Daisy stood inquiring of her lazy mind how she should wisely spend the long three hours that were such a mere preface to the coming evening. In the school-room indoors, Polly and Una, having declared it was too hot to be outside, were absolutely reading German novels—by way of improving their education and minds. Daisy, who shuddered at German, had fled and left them; with a momentary feeling that they were very learned and wise in pursuits, and she a silly housewifely simpleton, only raised to romance by being in love.

Little she knew they were both devouring the ardent love-stories of two just such simple German maidens—that was all the nature of their deep studies, that "and nothing more!"

Where was Mrs. Dimity? She was superintending the two housemaids with an eye of languid doubtfulness, fearing the guests' bed-rooms were not properly arranged, or their sheets not aired; or else she was mildly aggravating the cook by aimless inroads into the kitchen.

Where was the squire? His favourite daughter felt inclined to pass this last afternoon with him, by way of consolation for the loss he would soon feel. But he was having a warm altercation with his steward, in the farmyard premises, on the important subject of grass seeds.

And where was Fuzzy Cox—ah, where? No one quite knew; she had mysteriously slipped away.

Thus Daisy was still standing on the doorstep; not feeling lonely, nor neglected, nor anything in particular; but rather restlessly happy, swinging her hat.

She looked with a hesitating eye towards the garden, wondering whether she should take her solitariness there to eat fruit. It was a comfortable square garden, behind the house, of the kind we all know. High wall and high fruit-trees, strawberry-beds and gravel-walks all round; then the small fruit-trees with the vegetables in the middle, discreetly half-hidden by sweet-pea hedges.

It was very nice, but not romantic.

Daisy felt a wish for some more sylvan nook; where, if she could not carve Gascoigne's name upon the trees, she might, at least, whisper in spirit to them of this gentleman of many excellences.

So down she went towards the wood, their one wood, the only romantic spot they had in the flat, comfortable grounds.

The calm brown river slid by here, under the solemn elms. Daisy loved it as the only piece of water in the demesne; and though somewhat too sluggish of flow, yet the yellow water-irises stood up bravely with their sword-leaves along its banks, and the water-lily cups rode, thick and white, upon its gentle current. Overhead, up among the high, stiff branches, the rooks were cawing. It was shady, still, and almost a little dull here.

On a sudden, Daisy slightly started, seeing the flutter of a dress up the river-side.

It was Fuzzy Cox, and with her surely not—but, yes! surely indeed, the Reverend Adolphus Younghusband, going demurely by her side.

There was an arbour near; one Daisy did not greatly like, because of a wooden eagle topping its thatched roof, or rather which with decrepitude seemed tipsily tumbling off its pointed perch, a most disconsolate fowl.

Into this arbour, however, Daisy darted, with a sudden impulse to get out of the way. Then she softly peeped out, not quite sure whether it was not a mean thing to do; and yet *really* all she wanted was to watch which way they should take, that she might go in the opposite direction.

They came quite near by the back of the arbour, the

most sequestered way. The young celibate was demurely and softly pacing, with Fuzzy's arm drawn through his own.

"You will come with me as far as the opening in the wood, will you not? There can be no harm in our going just so far together," he was pleading. "There is a view there, over a cornfield; I should like you to see it first when we are together. It is of my—of, of *our* future home."

And Fuzzy, even with more intense propriety, replied:

"I am sure it is lovely. What real pleasure it will be always to live in the country! But—but remember, dear Adolphus, you must really not tempt me to walk any further."

"Oh, her shoes are too tight," thought Daisy, sagely shaking her head. "I remember wondering this afternoon why she had put on her best town ones."

After this, little Miss Dimity, knowing that the couple were not likely to return that way, strolled leisurely forth, with much thought over this turn of affairs. She wandered slowly forward, fishing for water-lilies as she went, with her parasol, and bringing many dripping treasures to land. Intent on this, she did not know what a pretty picture she made.

"Hallo!" cried Jemmy, one of her smallest brothers, giving her sleeve a violent tug; "I say——"

"Jemmy dear, how you made my heart jump! What is the matter?"

"Nothing," replied that unconcerned young man of seven years, "'ceptin' there's a fellow—a gentleman—says he wants to speak to you very particular. He said his name was Jerry Brown."

"*Jerry Brown!* Oh, my goodness! Where is he?"

"He's in the arbour, waiting. My! was that a fish?"

"What was he like, Jemmy dear? What was he like?" in tones of agony.

"He's an awful—— I do believe it's a water-rat."

"An awful *what*——?" inquired Daisy, visibly trembling, her face quite pale with fear of the coming unknown lover; her heart, at Jemmy's light utterance of the word awful, going fairly down to her heels. Jemmy answered, in a great hurry to be at more important matters:

"Don't I tell you, he's a howling what-you-may-call-it!—Oh, my eye! It is a water-rat; let me get a stone to kill it."

Daisy seized her young brother by the shoulders, almost inclined to shake him.

"A howling *what?*—an awful *what?* Never mind the rat; you must tell me."

"Let me go," struggling and kicking, in fear that the rat would escape him. "What plagues girls are! Didn't I tell you?" in a sort of weeping shout. "He looks a tremenjous swell."

With a sort of sigh of partly deliverance, partly increased awe, Daisy removed her hands. Away tore Jemmy down stream, like a loosed arrow. Slowly and sadly our poor damsel approached that terrible den of an arbour; with quaking heart and quivering limbs, her hands unconsciously still full of "water-lilies, broad and bright." She neared it; she was in the doorway, and, without daring to raise her head, was aware of a presence.

"You are—you are——" she murmured.

"I am Mr. Jerry Brown," said a strong, well-known voice overhead, with suppressed laughter. She looked up; she raised her head.

"Oh, is it you?" she uttered, with a glad, small cry of utter delight, as she found herself drawn into the arbour gently by Gascoigne. "But how could you tell such a fib?" she asked, with loving reproach that accepts any excuse fondly, when they were sufficiently sane to return to this history.

"What fib?—I told no fib."

"*Oh!* . . . You told Jemmy to say you were Jerry Brown."

"Look me in the face," was all Gascoigne's oracular reply. And as Miss Daisy, not very loath, wonderingly did his bidding, and gazed up in his face—suddenly a light seemed to dawn upon her from his good, gray eyes.

"Is it possible? You cannot be——!" she just ejaculated.

"Yes; I am Gerald or Jerry Brownrigg Gascoigne. Now, look at me well again. Do you remember, I had reddish hair to my sorrow, as a boy; but, after being shaven in a fever, it grew more brown. And then, in the Barley Vicarage days, of course I was what poets call a beardless boy, and hardly full-grown. Ah! I am afraid you don't remember much about poor Jerry Brown, after all; and that you were as fickle in heart as the rest of your sex."

"No, no; indeed! And I remembered far more about you than you did about me." (She had the best of it there.)

"After all, it was very long ago; and you are very changed; and then the name led me astray."

"It was long ago," assented Gascoigne; "but you are not so very changed, I believe; though I must own the recollection of the little Daisy I used to meet when fishing by the river was almost asleep in my memory, till first your name stirred it, and little by little it awoke. Only I could not have remembered the name of Dimity, till you unconsciously brought all our former wooing back to me. Perhaps such a pretty name as Daisy was enough for me then."

"But I used to be quite grieved yours was so ugly. Why did you tell me it was *Brown?*"

"Because," laughed Gascoigne, "the second time we ever met each other, when no one had introduced us by the river-side, though you spent the whole afternoon with me, miss!—well, that day I happened to be playing truant from my tutor. And not wishing anyone to find out afterwards that I had been fishing, in an idle mood, when you asked my name, I told you part of it. Afterwards, being rather in love with you, it pleased me you should have a different name for me from the rest of the world."

"No. Were you really?" in secret intense delight. "Ah! you are only saying that, now, to please me."

"No, indeed. I have never forgotten that time of our golden age. There was always a dim, pleasant memory of you in my mind as my little first love."

And then with mutual "Do you remembers?" and glad assents and delighted retravelling of the old road of wooing, these two unveiled the recollections of bygone days—till on a sudden Gascoigne remembered the present.

"What will all the rest think of us?" he asked, laughing. "You don't even know yet that your brother and Mr. Lee are in the house. I found there was an earlier train we could catch by driving across country, and persuaded them to come. What will they say?"

And as these two slowly returned and came in sight of the house, the tall figure of Gascoigne beside Daisy's little trim one, both apparently suiting each other with a wonderful fitness—Jack's voice called in kindly gibing from the lawn, where all the rest were gathered together for tennis and tea, "Well, you are a pretty couple!"

"We have brought you the latest news from Marstown," cried the Smiler gaily, after he had rushed to congratulate

Daisy, and, smiling like the sun, had twisted his moustaches more than ever, murmuring aside: How that he had guessed it all along, what an Irresistible One she was, to be sure! while dear old Gascoigne was the greatest friend he had in the world—"We have brought you news (where's Miss Cox?) of another wedding *on the tapis*. Excuse a bad joke, won't you?—ho, ho!"

"Yes," graciously allowed Jack.

"Miss Pussy is going to marry the old carpet-maker; and Miss Birdie is ready to scratch her eyes out."

L'ENVOI.

For now is Palamon in alle well,
Lyvynge in blisse, in richesse, and in hele;
And Emelye him loveth so tendrely,
And he her serveth al so gentilly,
That nevere was ther no word hem bitweene
Of jealousye, or any other teene.
Thus endeth Palamon and Emelye,
And God save al this fayre compainye.

They had been a very merry party at Elm Hall during three or four days. But the last evening had come of Jack's stay.

The day after his arrival home he had had an offer of going out as aide-de-camp to a general who had just been desired by Mother England to give some savage tribes a thrashing in one of her most distant colonies. The matter was not really England's business; but, since Great Britons have received the divine mission to act as moral policemen of the earth, the general's orders were, that these tribes were first to be beaten and then be forgiven.

A new life had been infused into young Jack. He had not been heard to grumble more than twice a day, and was in the cheerfullest good-humour; though Daisy had frequently been caught in a shower of tears; and even Polly, who used to plume herself on her Spartan feelings ere this, looked more alarmed than proud at her brother's distinction.

But Jack was so delighted, they had to cheer up. And Gascoigne's presence, as may be imagined, vastly comforted Daisy. The Smiler likewise was full of joyous predictions.

"Lucky dog; he won't get a scratch, you'll see, and will

come back with his medals; and you'll all think him no end of a hero. I only wish it was me."

"I wish it was," said young Polly, half tearfully, half maliciously.

And now the young people were all sitting out on the lawn after dinner. The squire was, as usual, nodding indoors; and Mrs. Dimity was busy at some work, as was also usual, by her lamp in the drawing-room. At present she was industriously knitting in haste woollen socks "for dear Jack to take away with him," which, as he was going to a very warm climate, proved more affection than discretion, like most of Mrs. Dimity's occupations.

But, out of doors, the young folk were all delightfully idle, enjoying the cool evening air, the gloaming, and each other's society. They were seated rather in twos and twos —"Like St. Valentine's Day, ain't it?" as the Smiler gaily remarked. But then he meant the engaged couples.

Quite farthest away of all sat Fuzzy Cox and her curate on a garden-bench, with the greatest air of meek demureness in the world. The rest were comfortably at ease on rugs and wicker chairs on the smooth-shaven grass, and had their jokes in common; but this behaviour of ordinarily vulgar mortals was unsuited to the still æstheticism of the thoughtful pair sitting on the bench.

Gascoigne was absolutely smoking (what a contrast!), strolling up and down with Daisy.

They came often just near enough the rest not to seem selfish, and to have a joke and a loving sisterly word for poor Jack; just far enough at times not to bore others with talk that was then indeed entirely absorbed with each other.

"What a delightfully well-suited couple those two do make!" rather dreamily observed Una Goodchild. "One can quite well fancy it will be true of them, after their marriage, that, as the story-books say, 'they lived happy ever after.'"

"Yes," said Jack approvingly, who was beside her and Polly. "I'm very glad I shall just manage to be at the wedding before my start. By the time I come back again, Miss Goodchild; I suppose both you and Polly here will be spliced likewise."

Una Goodchild slightly laughed, but looked down.

"Oh, no; I don't think so," she softly said. "When a woman once marries she can't draw back, and try whether

she would not be happier in devoting herself to what are more the works of single women. I think either of going to Girton College, or of being trained as a sick nurse, for a year or two; or at least—if my parents want me to stay at home—giving my life up to art. No: I shall have too much to do to think of getting married to anyone before you come home, Mr. Dimity."

"Well, whatever you do, don't go into a sisterhood or a nunnery," said Jack lightly.

The mutual tendency to liking of these two had become a feeling of excellent friendliness. On Jack's part it might have been more, but that with their meeting at Elm Hall had come his call for active service, which, man-like, quite filled his mind. And so he

> Look'd upon her with a soldier's eye,
> That lik'd, but had a rougher task in hand
> Than to drive liking to the name of love.

And for Una, it had never dawned upon her that at Marstown she might have had, if she had liked it, a flirtation with her friend's brother. Her mind had been too full of efforts at leading "a higher life," as she vaguely phrased it. Her conversations with Jack—had the world only heard them—were the most single-minded, earnest endeavours to infuse enthusiasm into that martial Gallio for the god-like heroes or aims which in that hour were enshrined in the chiefest place of her young mind's sanctuary. Or if these were too sacred, or Jack too carelessly good-humoured, she used to bring out whichever of her hobbies whose turn it was to be exercised, and Jack was sure to admire them.

And so she had not fancied herself in love with Jack Dimity because—fancy had been busy with other matters.

Meanwhile the poor Smiler was faring worst of all these valentines, as he called them, because Polly snubbed him atrociously. Such an utter schoolroom minx as she was! Yet she laughed at his real "big diamonds" in compliments.

"What a humbug you are, Mr. Lee! I really believe you are the most incarnate humbug on earth. It is a wonder Daisy never found you out."

"No, really; upon my honour I am not. People sometimes say so, but it is only the unkindness of the world and scandal against me. I have felt it often very deeply, and I

only hope you may not some day," sighed Lee, smiling no more, but looking as sad as the sun in a fog; wagging his head with an air of injury that would really have melted any female young person's heart who did not know that in ten minutes he would have forgotten or forgiven all his imaginary enemies.

"What, is Polly at it again?" called out Jack this evening. "I tell you what, if you are so pert, young woman, you'll never get a husband, if ever you do come to a ball of ours."

"Don't distress yourself," said Polly saucily. "Daisy has told me of two quiet gentlemen, one of whom might take a fancy to me—who knows?—just by way of contrast."

"Oh, you are a clever one—what a clever one you are!" murmured the Smiler, who had now recovered himself, gazing at her bright young face with almost his best air of admiration; although, in general, very young girls were not so much to his taste as those who knew that his flirtation was meant to sparkle, not to burn, and, by a little experience, were too wise to fall really in love—which would have distressed him very much. But Polly was a sensible girl, he thought to himself with satisfaction, and could take care of her heart.

Of course there was also Una Goodchild to consider (since he was not himself without some one of the fair sex to chaff and adore), but, though a flirt, he was a friend. Was he likely to go and "cut out" his less attractive comrade; to interfere in the last sweet home amusement of the poor soldier, soon under orders for barbarous climes? Oh, no; never!—not if it even cost him far more. So, with an inward feeling of his own nobility, this self-sacrificing youth courted Polly. And now, as they all sat or lay on the grass and talked of wedding presents, rice showers, and old slippers, the young brothers of the house of Dimity suddenly burst across the lawn with clamour; jumped the ha-ha with shouts—all but the youngest, who stood hesitating on its brink, and yelled—and attacking an apparently peaceful individual toiling towards them along a path that crossed the lawn, despoiled him of a bag he carried, then returned with an air of savage joy. The peaceful family party, who witnessed this deed of robbery, only remarked, with a calm air:

"It's the postman."

Everyone now began to share the news. But, ere Fuzzy Cox and her gentle, affianced partner had approached with

measured step, Jack eagerly announced, so loud that the accents must have disturbed the air within a yard of the unsuspecting couple:

"I say, what do you all think—the old colonel will certainly come himself to the wedding, Daisy; and he bids me tell Miss Fuzzy Cox, as to her *fiancé*, that 'an ounce of mother wit is worth a pound of clergy!'"

When the applause which this excellent proverb elicited had died away, Daisy observed, in her turn:

"And I have heard from the dear old Misses Silverthorne. They are coming to stay for my wedding, also; and are bringing a present of two nodding China mandarins, and an Old Derby tea-set, even more ancient and much more valuable than themselves, they say. And they promise not to cry at any changes they may see in Elm Hall."

"Thank goodness!" piously ejaculated Gascoigne, in his dreamily pleasant drawl.

"Oh, here's a letter from mamma, and she's very glad to accept dear Adolphus's invitation to receive her for the wedding, too," called out Fuzzy, with more animation than was usual of late with her, reading over her curate's shoulder. "Birdie isn't well pleased that you've not asked her to be a bridesmaid as well as me, dear Daisy. Well, is she not going to be mine and Pussy's a fortnight later—what more does she want? . . . And, oh! mamma is so delighted with the Indian shawl you and Captain Gascoigne sent her—she says it is even handsomer than the old one."

At this moment attention was again drawn to the young Dimity tribe, who emerged from the house once more, making martial music with their mouths; all their red young cheeks distended like those of trumpeters. They came in a sort of procession.

First came Billy, with his brother Jack's new helmet of war and sword, trailing and bumping on the ground. Next, Bobby, wearing the luckless Smiler's most beautiful Sunday hat, that came down low on his chubby nose; whilst to emulate an acrobat, he continually ducked his pate, trying to kick the shining headgear with his toe.

Jemmy—and he was Daisy's especial darling—followed, wearing Gascoigne's best dust-coat, which being much too large for him spread behind in a fine train. On this train Charlie and the big, petticoated Baby made frantic rushes, stamping upon it with jeers, whereunto Jemmy retaliated—

like the wild Irishman he simulated—with invitations to battle.

There was an instant rush made upon these young rascals by Jack, Daisy, and Polly (to the infinite relief, it need hardly be remarked, of Gascoigne and Lee). The two first brigands were captured and relieved of their stolen goods in a few moments. But as Daisy herself pursued that arch-sinner Jemmy, whilst he escaped with loud outcries, the dear dust-coat was caught by its pocket on the door-scraper. There was the shriek of rent lining! But even as Daisy, who had caught the culprit, gazed aghast—a beautiful brilliant brooch, containing in the middle a diamond of great size and purest lustre, rolled at her feet.

"My lost Marguerite brooch, I declare," exclaimed Gascoigne, with joy, coming up. "This is the identical rare daisy namesake of yours I lost on the evening of our ball, Daisy. It was the present I meant for you—an old family heirloom."

And so, in the midst of the general joy and congratulation on the recovery of this lost treasure, the tribe of Gad not only escaped punishment, but even had the insolence to awaken the echoes of Elm Hall with clamorous claims for a holiday on the morrow, in recompense for their share in the discovery.

THE END.

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